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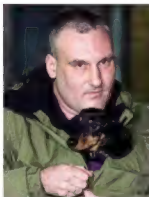
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## EDITORIAL

## SPOOKS AND SAUSAGE DOGS



## FROM SALISBURY WITH LOVE

The UK news media, both mainstream and 'alternative', have unsurprisingly been preoccupied with the attempted assassination of Sergei Skripal (see p5), a former Russian double agent, with what appears to be a mysterious substance called Novichok, a product of Soviet-era secret chemical weapons research. Skripal, 66, imprisoned for spying in Russia and released in a prisoner exchange, was found collapsed on a park bench in the middle of Salisbury along with his daughter Yulia, 33. The smallest cathedral city in Wiltshire is not usually noted for international espionage dramas (or the biohazard-suited emergency services pictured at right), but residents who might have visited a branch of Zizzi restaurant, now screened off and surrounded by police, are being told to wash their clothes; which may or not be effective at removing mysterious Soviet nerve agents. Indeed, you may want to be careful where you eat in Salisbury; there are now reports of a woman in a black "SARS mask" being spotted in a nearby Pret a Manger just before the attack.

As we go to press, the Prime Minister has announced that Russian involvement in the affair seems "highly likely" and has given Putin's administration a deadline to explain its actions, while US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has declared that the attack "clearly came from Russia" - which does, of course, have form for this sort of thing. Nevertheless, Andrei Lugovoi, almost certainly one of the assassins who poisoned Alexander Litvinenko in a Mayfair hotel back in 2006, has suggested the whole affair has been got up by the British government to "demonise" Moscow.

Further Russian weirdness abounds in this issue. In his Science column (p14), David Hambling takes a look at another bit of Cold War-era research that's been making a comeback: it involves immersing dachshunds in tanks of oxygenated liquid. Meanwhile, SD Tucker (p48) goes back to the early years of the Soviet Union to explore the work of the Russian Cosmists and their plan to extend State control of every aspect of human life to time itself.



## ERRATA

**FT364-1:** Rob Gandy emailed to point out that while the contents page refers to "the Ancient Roman spoons of Cheshire" and the cover to "the Ancient Roman spoons of Chester", Alan Murdie's Ghostwatch is actually about Harry Martindale's celebrated sighting of Ancient Roman spoons in York.

**FT364-40:** We would like to apologise for not providing correct attribution for the photograph of Josef Jakobs, which should have been as follows: Copyright GK Jakobs / [www.josefjakobs.com](http://www.josefjakobs.com). Giselle Jakobs is one of Josef's granddaughters and has been researching his life for the last 30 years; her website is an excellent resource for information about Josef's life and times.

**FT364-41:** Michael Hunneman spotted a classic howler in the footnotes to Cathi Unsworth's cover feature, "Who Put Bella in the Wygh Elm?", where note 22 refers to "the capture of Herman Hess [sic] in Scotland on 10 May 1941". Clearly this was meant to refer to Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess, captured after his bizarre solo flight to Scotland to negotiate peace with the British government. The German-born writer Hermann Hesse, author of *Steppenwolf* and *Siddhartha*, was equally committed to peace, of course, his books being later taken up enthusiastically by the counterculture of the 1960s. Hesse had become a Swiss citizen in 1923, his works having been banned in Germany since the late-1930s. In 1941 he was at work on *The Glass Bead Game*, which was eventually printed in Switzerland in 1943.

**FT364-67:** The review of Electric Dreams was wrongly attributed to Martin Parsons. It was, in fact, written by Daniel King.

  
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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

# STRANGE DAYS

## FROZEN HANDS AND FIERY FOOTPRINTS

Enigmatic extremities: a bag of mystery hands and a phantom hitchhiker with burning feet

### HANDY MYSTERY

A bag containing 54 human hands has been found on an island in the Amur River near Khabarovsk, a city of 590,000 in southeastern Russia close to the Chinese border. Photos of the scene show the hands spilled out into a single pile, and then organized into 27 matching pairs and placed in rows. The island is in the Beshennaya channel of the Amur River, a popular fishing spot. Khabarovsk residents did not notice anything suspicious. Investigators have managed to lift a pair of fingerprints belonging to one of the hands, and the others are being checked. No information was given about the age of the hands or when they might have been discarded, but the images suggest they are reasonably fresh. Were the hands cut off as punishment for theft, or perhaps as medical amputations? The latter is weird and unlikely, given they were found in matching pairs. Or were they cut off as practice for medical students? This last idea is lent support by the discovery of medical bandages and hospital-style plastic shoe covers next to the remains. *Siberian Times*, 8 Mar 2018.

### BURNING FOOTPRINTS

On 26 February, Pedro Peirone, from the town of San Jose de la Esquina, in Santa Fe, Argentina, was driving home when he saw a young man hitchhiking on the side of the road. As he often did on his business trips around the province, he pulled over and offered to give the hitchhiker a ride. He seemed



ABOVE: The 54 hands found on an island in the Amur River.  
BELOW: Shoeprints melted into Pedro Peirone's car mat.

a bit shy, and all Peirone was able to get out of him was that he came from the neighbouring town of Arteaga and that he was 17 years old. When asked if he was going all the way to San Jose de la Esquina, he said "No", adding that he would let Peirone know where he'd like to get out. "Finally, he asked me to drop him off at the junction with the road leading to the cemetery, and, as soon as I got there, I sensed an awful burning smell," said Peirone. "I stopped to see if something had caught fire, got out to check the back of

the truck, and as soon as I turned around, I noticed there was no one inside." He went to check the front passenger seat, but all he found was two footprints melted into the rubber car mat and a lingering burnt smell. He looked around to see if the youth had just run out faster than he could spot him, but there was no sign of him anywhere and no other footprints. Some friends of Peirone happened to drive by moments later and helped him look for the hitchhiker for a while, but they couldn't find anything.

Unable to explain what had happened, Peirone went to the police and told them the whole story. Word of his experience spread, and soon

he was contacted by dozens of TV and radio stations for interviews. He even took some of the reporters to the place where the hitchhiker allegedly vanished, and showed them the burnt shoe prints melted into the car mats. The media did a little digging on Peirone to find out if he was the kind of man who would make up such an unusual story, but everyone they talked to described him as an upstanding member of the community, a hard-working man and a good Catholic. Peirone himself admitted that he had always put his faith in the Blessed Virgin Mary, and never really believed in paranormal activity, but that the bizarre occurrence had left him confused. "I'm a little stressed, nervous. I'm not afraid, but I just cannot explain what happened," he said. *oddtipcentral.com*, 7 Mar 2018.



## FOOLED BY FAKES

Cuddly tiger sparks panic in cattle shed

PAGE 6



## PATRICIDAL PRINCE

Screaming mummy was daddy killer

PAGE 12



## SUPER SENIORS

Celebrating the world's oldest people

PAGE 22

# THE CONSPIRASPHERE

The mysterious chemical attack on a former Russian double agent is prompting conspiracy theories from both the mainstream and the margins, notes **NOEL ROONEY...**

## NERVOUS AGENTS

On 4 March, in the quiet town of Salisbury, former Russian double agent Sergei Skripal, and his daughter Yulia, who was visiting him from Moscow, were found in a state of near unconsciousness on a park bench. Several witnesses attested to Skripal acting very strangely, pointing at the sky and occasionally gesticulating wildly. Eventually, a passing doctor and nurse took the situation in hand, examined the pair of by now comatose Russians, and called in the police and paramedics. They were taken to Salisbury District Hospital, where it was eventually confirmed that they were suffering from the effects of a nerve agent.

They were not the only people affected by the mysterious substance. A police officer who assisted at the scene is still critically ill, and there are reports that up to 21 other people suffered ill-effects, although only three appear to remain in hospital. A major incident has been declared, and the Army has been called in; a convoy of trucks and heavy equipment rumbled into Salisbury during the week, and locals were left scratching their heads at the small-scale military invasion.

Naturally, the incident has revived memories of the infamous Litvinenko affair in 2006 (see **FT218:4-5; 220-4; 325-5**), when another Russian émigré, Alexander Litvinenko, was apparently poisoned with a deadly radioactive isotope, Polonium 210, a substance 250 times more deadly than cyanide, while having tea with a couple of ex-KGB colleagues in London. Litvinenko has been repeatedly alluded to in media reports. He's not the only one. Several other members of the Skripal family appear to have come to untimely ends in recent years. Mrs Skripal died in 2012, at the relatively tender age of 59, of an aggressive form of stomach cancer, and one of Skripal's sons died in mysterious circumstances in St Petersburg in March of last year, while another died in unexplained circumstances

two years ago. Police and forensic experts have apparently been poking around in the cemetery where the other unfortunate members of the Skripal clan are laid to rest, clearly hoping to uncover more than a simple can of worms.

Tragedy cluster or conspiracy? The mainstream media are in no doubt; the nefarious Vladimir Putin clearly had it in for Skripal and his kin and ordered yet another spectacular assassination on British soil. The media have trotted out a litany of names, past martyrs to the evil Vlad's lust for revenge on those he sees as traitors to the Motherland: Alexander Perepilichny, Boris Berezovsky, and a few unlucky Brits: Gareth Williams, Matthew Punter, and Scot Young. Not to be outdone, the alternative media have recited their own litany, although for rather different reasons.

You could probably write the alternative take on the affair yourself, but just in case you are feeling lazy, you can go to Signs of the Times ([www.sott.net/article/379237-MIS-Poisons-Another-Russian-Asset-to-Smear-Putin-in-Ongoing-Propaganda-War](http://www.sott.net/article/379237-MIS-Poisons-Another-Russian-Asset-to-Smear-Putin-in-Ongoing-Propaganda-War)), where Joe Quinn has set out the case for Vlad's defence in clear and predictable terms. It was a set-up: the British secret establishment offed Sergei and Yulia Skripal, and endangered the good citizens of Salisbury with a nasty nerve agent, so that Putin would fail in his next election bid in Russia. Obviously, Russian media weren't too far away from Mr Quinn in their reading of the event, dragging in one of the prime suspects in the Litvinenko affair, Dmitry Kovtun, to finger the sneaky Brits for the hit.

The claims of Quinn et al are really no more outrageous than some of the stuff that has seeped into the UK mainstream press like a poison gas. In fact, this is one of those incidents where both sides of the increasingly porous media parallax wall have acted in something approaching unison. How long before we get both sides of the story in one mainstream publication?

## EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

## COWS FLYING INTO QATAR

D.Telegraph, 14 June 2017.

## Please resist the urge to kiss your pet chickens

Toronto Star, 21 June 2017.

## END THIS CHICKEN OBSESSION, URGES FOX

Times, 25 July 2017.

## Trains halted by cave man

D.Mirror, 16 Aug 2017.

## DRUNK IN SNAIL RAGE HEADBUTT

Sun, 27 Sept 2017.

## Lost penguin poo points to devastation

Canberra Times, 13 April 2017.



## SIDELINES...

### STIFF NEW YEAR

Grieving Kevin Rivera, 23, exhumed his late cousin Jassir José Rivera Gómez from the San Jacinto de Gaira cemetery in Santa Marta, Colombia, to "see in the New Year with him," but cut himself jumping on the cemetery wall and needed hospital treatment. Jassir had died two years earlier in a traffic accident. *elinuevoherald.com* (Miami), 2 Jan; *Metro*, 3 Jan 2018.

### SANTA'S NAUGHTY SISTER

Natasha Claus, 36, rode a motorbike naked through Woking in Surrey, punched a blind man and performed a sex act in the high street. She turned up at Guildford Crown Court four hours later, and was jailed for 13 months and banned from going to Sheenwater, the Woking suburb where she was said to have preyed on vulnerable men. *Times*, 29 Dec 2017.

### HAPPY CRISPMAS

A cat stuck at the top of an 80ft (24m) Christmas tree in Spicers Wood, Berkshire, with an empty packet of prawn cocktail crisps on her head was rescued by a fire crew using an aerial platform, as the tree was too high for their ladders. *D.Mirror*, 9 Dec 2017.

### DEVOUT DOG

Zennor, an 11-year-old Dalmatian from west Cornwall, was given a certificate of attendance and a silver bone ID name tag as a reward for attending church services at Balwest Methodist Church near Ashton, Helston, every week since she was four. *cornwalllive.com*, 17 May 2017.



## WON'T GET FOOLED AGAIN

Fake eyeballs, a bogus US embassy and a stuffed toy tiger on the loose in Scotland



ABOVE: The terrifying, yet oddly unmoving, big cat in Bruce Grubb's cattle shed, and (inset) the cuddly culprit revealed.

• Bruce Grubb, 24, was hosting a housewarming party at his new farm near Peterhead in Aberdeenshire, Scotland, on 3 February when he took a break to check on his livestock and was shocked to find a tiger in his dimly lit shed full of pregnant cows. "I was worried it was going to eat all my cows before police managed to shoot it," he said. Six cars of armed police officers soon arrived to surround the barn, while the Highland Wildlife Park near Kingussie, around 100 miles away, was asked to check on its two tigers. After a standoff of about 45 minutes, Grubb and the marksmen became suspicious when the tiger seemed to have remained perfectly still. Grubb drove up to it in his truck and found that it was a life-sized stuffed toy. Officers described the incident

*"I was worried it was going to eat all my cows..."*

as "a false call made with genuine good intent". They told Grubb they wanted to keep it as a mascot. (*Aberdeen Evening Express*, 5 Feb; *sabc.com*, 6 Feb; *D.Telegraph*, 7 Feb 2018).

• On 25 September last, a resident of Crestmead, south of Brisbane, Queensland, called Australia's national terrorism hotline to report a pressure cooker left on a footpath. The bomb squad carefully approached the appliance, which was emitting a strange smell. It turned out to be full of crabs. Police were unable to

confirm if the crabs were cooked or uncooked. (*Queensland Courier Mail*, 26 Sept 2017).

• On 9 January, police received a call from a concerned motorist who had noticed what looked like a dead body in a field close to Junction 11 of the M56, near Runcorn in Cheshire. Officers quickly mobilised to the scene, and spent an hour searching for the man. When they finally tracked him down, they found he was a Druid who had been doing some yoga in the field. The man then went on his way. *manchestereveningnews.co.uk*, 9 Jan 2018.

• Four Indian men, including a police driver, tried to con two gullible fellows into buying a wish-granting djinni (genie). Tapas Roy Choudhury got a call from a friend that there was a





djinni in a bottle for sale, and Choudhury told another friend, Basudeb Kundu. The price was reportedly a million rupees (roughly £11,000). Choudhury and Kundu went to a hotel, where they were met by four men. All of them got into a car with a police sticker on it. The would-be vendors, who weren't named, showed off a soda bottle and claimed that the djinni was inside. Choudhury told them he didn't actually have the money, whereupon they robbed the cash Choudhury and his friend had on them, which amounted to 600 rupees (£6.66). Somehow, Choudhury alerted a friend about what was happening, and police arrested the four suspects, but they were soon released on bail. *PTI (Press Trust of India) via rare.us, 21 Jan 2018.*

• A woman in Bishop's Cleeve, Gloucestershire, called the RSPCA to rescue a "cat" trapped under her wardrobe – only to be told by inspector Jack Anderson that it was a pair of slippers. She had put out bowls of food to coax the intruder from its hiding place. *Metro, 16 Jan 2018.*

• Two men were charged with offensive behaviour after fake eyeballs were thrown on a football pitch during a match involving a player with one eye. Dean Shiels, 32, was playing for Dunfermline in a home game against Falkirk on 2 January when the incident occurred. He lost an eye at age eight after an accident. *Metro, 31 Jan 2018.*

• The owners of a hamster called Dusty wrongly assumed their pet was dead and placed



it in a wheeled bin. Refuse collectors were surprised to find the small black and white creature crawling out of the top of the bin. They took it back to their depot and made a temporary home for it. The RSPCA said: "Wild hamsters hibernate during the winter, but wake up periodically to feed. In a warm house, artificial light and temperatures usually suppress this hibernation, which means it isn't common for domestic hamsters to hibernate. However, if your hamster is kept in a colder part of the house, it could go into hibernation during the winter and should be left alone." *D.Telegraph, 10 Feb 2018.*

• Late last year, news broke that for a decade Ghana had had two US embassies, one real and one fake. The fake, complete with a US flag outside, was a moneymaking scam that sold a range of false ID documents, fake visas and fraudulently obtained real visas. Possible giveaways included the fact that the "embassy" was in a shabby two-storey building with



a wiggly tin roof, and that it was staffed by Turks pretending to be Americans. The organised crime ring that ran it even advertised it on billboards across West Africa. <2> *29 Dec 2017.*

• Andy Sampson, 54, and Paul Adams, 58, had been metal detecting in a field in Suffolk when they found 54 ancient Roman "gold" coins with pottery, which they believed at the time could have been worth up to £250,000. "We had six emperor Nero coins," said Sampson, "and we knew they were worth £16,500 each." The pair, who had been metal detecting for only a year, had been given permission to sweep the field where Sampson had previously found a Roman coin. The finds were spread out along a 30ft (9m) long furrow. Sampson took the coins back home and showed them to his neighbour, himself a veteran detectorist and member of the Suffolk Archaeological Survey, who immediately said "they're not real – there's something wrong with them".

The pair made some inquiries and found out the farm was used as a filming location during the summer for the BBC Four comedy *Detectorists*, starring Toby Jones and Mackenzie Crook (who also wrote and directed the series). It emerged the production crew had filmed a tractor pulling a plough through the ground, unearthing the coins as it went. Not all of them had been retrieved, and they were the ones Sampson and Adams had found. They said they had finally "got over" their huge disappointment and it had not put them off the hobby. *BBC News, D.Telegraph, D.Mil, 31 Jan 2018.*

## SIDELINES...

### CHRISTMAS CHEEK

A woman returned her Christmas tree at a Costco in Santa Clara, California, on 4 January – 10 days after Christmas Day – and demanded a refund "because it was dead". Staff returned her money in full. Scott Bentley took a picture of the unnamed woman as he waited in line, and later shared it on Facebook. Apparently, anything (apart from electronics) can be returned to Costco for a refund, without time limit. *dailyrecord.co.uk, 10 Jan 2018.*

### LATEST SHAKE-UP

The 4.4 magnitude tremor in Wales at 2.31pm on 17 February was the largest earthquake to hit mainland UK since the 5.2 magnitude Market Rasen quake in 2008. The epicentre was 12 miles (19km) northeast of Swansea at a depth of around five miles (8km). It was felt as far away as the Midlands, but there were no reports of serious damage or injury. *Sunday Telegraph, 18 Feb 2018.*

### MAGIC ICE CREAM

Tanatet Torboonsittikorn (aka Mor Gan or Potatus) a self-styled extraterrestrial guru in Chiang Mai, Thailand, claimed on TV and Facebook that his "alien ice cream" used Earth's magnetic field to rejuvenate cells and could cure cancer, diabetes and paralysis – just send him 500 baht (£11). When Public Health officials visited his house, he had done a runner. *City Life (Chiang Mai), 5 Jan; Thaivisa.com, 8 Jan 2018.*

### IN A HOLE

After a family row, a man climbed into a really big hole in his garden in Bathaston, two miles east of Bath, Somerset, at 4am, and refused to get out. A specialist team from Avon Fire and Rescue Service arrived at 7am and put a crane over the hole. The unnamed man was eventually coaxed out of the hole, which he had been digging for weeks. Why he had made it remained unexplained. *Metro, 8 Dec 2017.*

### NO-BELL PEACE PRIZE

Chauheer Dipak Das, 52, has won a good driving award after not honking his horn for 18 years in car-packed Kolkata, India. The award-givers presumably had to take his word for it. *Sunday Mirror, 7 Jan 2018.*



ABOVE: The fake US embassy in Accra, Ghana. TOP: Dusty and his rescuers.

## SIDELINES...

### WHISTLING IN DECLINE

UNESCO has declared the "bird language" of Black Sea villagers in northern Turkey endangered, blaming mobile phones as a key threat to its survival. About 10,000 people use the language – a highly developed system of whistling – to communicate across long distances in their rugged mountain terrain. It is still commonly used in Kuskoy, which translates as "bird village", but elsewhere survives only in a "few words spoken by shepherds". *BBC News, 6 Dec 2017.*

### FIGHTING THE REPTILES

A 40-year-old man was arrested after driving to Zion Church in Troy, Michigan, and shooting out a window at 4am on 10 January. He was caught after phoning Troy police to explain the dome-shaped church was "an alien spaceship for reptiles". Police traced the call around 5:45am to the suspect's home. "Mental health could be an issue here," said a police spokesman. *CBS Detroit, fox2detroit.com, 10 Jan 2018.*

### NEW LIVING GODDESS

Trishna Shakya, a girl aged three, was anointed as the next Kumari ("living goddess") in Kathmandu, Nepal, and taken to live in an ancient palace on 28 September after her predecessor retired. She was selected from four candidates after a 21-day process that included spending a night among heads of slaughtered goats and buffalo. She will be worshipped as the living embodiment of the Hindu goddess Taleju. *Irish Independent, 29 Sept 2017.*



## ITS A MIRACLE!

The BVM appears to Indian schoolgirls and gets a grandfather back on his feet



PHOTO: DES FITZGERALD

### STAND UP FOR MARY

Des Fitzgerald, 82, a former butcher and bookmaker, claims he could walk properly for the first time in years soon after obtaining a 4ft (1.2m) tall statue of the Virgin Mary. The grandfather, from Greystones in Limerick City, recently purchased the BVM statue for 400 euros to mark the centenary of the first apparitions in Fatima, Portugal. After alternating between using a wheelchair and walking aid for a decade, he said his prayers had been answered. "I hadn't the statue 10 minutes when I was able to walk fully," he said. "It was a miracle straight away. To prove it to myself, I walked out of the house, down to the gate and back up again. Before, I was barely able to stand up for a minute on my own." He said he was afraid to wake up each morning in case he suddenly found that his mobility has been impaired again. A shrine, under construction at the time of the news report, was blessed by a number of priests, while a decade of the Rosary was to be said at the site. *Irish Independent, 13 Oct 2017.*

### KERALA APPARITIONS

Both Hindu and Catholic schoolchildren in India claim to have witnessed an apparition of Christ and several appearances

of the Virgin Mary accompanied by the scent of jasmine. *Matters India* recounted the apparitions based on a note on the parish billboard by parish priest Father Mathew D'Cunha. The phenomena – which unfolded at St Ambrose Church and Lower Primary School in Edavanakkad in Kerala, 16 miles (26km) north of Kochi – reportedly began on 28 September when a student at the school, a Hindu girl named Kristnaveada, went to the church to pray for her (unspecified) ear problem to be healed. She put some holy water on her ear, and told fellow students that this had "helped" her ear. When the children left the school to pray in the church, they looked up and saw in the sky a vision of Christ being scourged. They recited the name of Jesus and went into the church to thank God for healing the girl's ear.

The only Catholic girl among them, Ambrosiya, volunteered to lead the group in praying the rosary, but she "did not know the Luminous Mysteries recited on a Thursday and sought a teacher's help." The children were praying when the teacher reached them at about 1.45pm. One of the girls, Anusree, told the teacher that the Blessed Virgin was standing under the altar. They reported the smell of jasmine. The apparition told the children to come closer, which frightened a girl named Sivanya, who said she wanted to leave. While the teacher was leading the children out of the church, the girls said the apparition followed them and pleaded with them not to leave. Some of the children then went to see Father Merton D'Silva, the assistant priest, who took them back to the church to pray, where they again said the Virgin Mary was standing under the altar. D'Silva couldn't see anything. The BVM promised the children help with their studies and "promised to send them the Holy Spirit" and to take them to Heaven.

On 3 October a large crowd gathered and prayed the rosary in the church with the reputed visionaries. After a time, everyone perceived the scent of jasmine and the children said they saw the BVM again. Father D'Cunha asked the children to point out the exact spot. The congregation saw a bright light and the priest said he felt someone patting his head. Many said they received the gift of contrition as they prayed. *Catholic Times, 20 Oct 2017.*



TOP: Des Fitzgerald, walking tall. ABOVE: Some of the schoolgirl visionaries in Kerala.



# PET PORTENTS

Baby Jesus bunny, psychic guinea pigs and a goat bearing the name of Allah...



## HOT CROSS BUNNY

Just before Christmas, a cross appeared on the forehead of a large brown rabbit called Fluff. Kate Hazel, from Penzance, Cornwall, who has owned Fluff for less than a year, went to feed her one day with her young daughter Rosa, who told her "Mum, Fluff's turning into the baby Jesus. She's grown this cross right in the middle of her forehead." Ms Hazel, 51, said: "I had a look and it was really pronounced. It didn't come gradually, just suddenly, one day. Someone else saw it and said it looks just like St Piran's Cross. So, she's either a reincarnation of St Piran, or the baby Jesus, or both." She hopes that Fluff will keep her cross until Easter, adding: "A hot cross bunny in the garden would be nice." *daily mail.co.uk*, 8 Jan 2018.

## ...AND THE HOLY GOAT

The revered name of Allah in Arabic appeared last year on the body of a black baby goat (kid), somewhere in Nigeria, and was publicised on a Facebook page, *Rariya\_gossip.naij.com* (Nigeria), 29 Sept 2017.



## PSYCHIC GUINEA PIGS

Clive and Rose Restall were told in November 2015 that they must either part company with their 21 guinea pigs or leave their home in Plymouth, Devon, as the pets breached their tenancy agreement. However, the couple claimed that their guinea pigs had been crucial to Mr Restall, 57, getting through his cancer treatment and that they had special powers. They said the rodents had helped members of the community with their personal problems and had even helped influence the future "Lots of people like to come and visit them,"



said Mr Restall. "Some people speak to them about their problems. There was one lad who came in and asked the guinea pigs to help bring his father back from Afghanistan, and they did. And there is a young lady we know who is having trouble at home with her parents, but she comes in and talks to them. They're a means of communication. They

listen to your problems and they help."

Mr Restall bought his first batch of guinea pigs as part of his rehabilitation after being diagnosed with kidney cancer in 2010. *Western Daily Press*, 2 Nov 2015.

# SIDELINES...

## SOLE SURVIVOR

Sam Quilliam, 28, was kissing a Dover sole he had caught on 5 October when the 6in (14cm) fish wiggled out of his hand and jumped down his trachea. He stopped breathing and suffered cardiac arrest at the scene on Boscombe Pier, Bournemouth Dorset. Paramedics managed to restart his heart and remove the fish with forceps. The fish's barbs and gills became stuck in Quilliam's throat, but Matt Hanson extracted it in one piece after six attempts (*Bournemouth D Echo*, BBC News, 12 Oct; *D Telegraph*, 13+14 Oct 2017).

## ENDURING RAINBOW

On 30 November, staff and students at the Chinese Culture University in Taipei, Taiwan, observed a rainbow for eight hours and 58 minutes - from 6.57am to 3.55pm. This broke the previous record of six hours (9am to 3pm) on 14 August 1994, seen in Sheffield, Yorkshire. *Times*, 7 Dec 2017.

## UP A TREE

Gilbert Sanchez, 47, left his home in La Paz, Philippines, to live 60ft (18m) up a nearby coconut tree in 2014, after being hit on the head with a gun during an altercation. Afraid someone would come to kill him, for three years he never came down, until authorities "rescued" him by force on 11 October. Every day, his mother Winfreda would bring him food, water and cigarettes, which he hauled up by rope. *thavisa.com*, 24 Oct 2017.

## INFLATABLE PENGUINS

Tourists flocking to Guishan Zoo in Yulin City, southern China, to see extremely rare penguins "from the South Pole" were furious to find the birds were inflatable toys. The only real animals were chickens, ducks and tortoises. Visitors were not refunded their £1.60 ticket price. *Metro*, 1 Dec 2017.

## SWAN ATROCITY

Three swans were found stabbed and beheaded. Two were in a park and the third by a lake, all in Thamesmead, southeast London. Another three missing signets and a Canada goose were feared to have met the same gory fate. This could be the work of the Croydon cat killer, active since 2015. *D Mirror*, Sun, 14 Dec 2017.

## SIDELINES...

### Sphinx Unearthed

Archaeologists digging in the sand dunes of Guadalupe-Nipomo, California, have unearthed a five-ton sphinx made of painted plaster, which featured in *The Ten Commandments*, a 1923 film directed by Cecil B. DeMille [see **F163/29**]. In total, 20 sphinxes were made for the movie and subsequently buried in the dunes 175 miles (280km) northwest of Los Angeles. *Times*, 4 Dec 2017

### Trombone Trashed

An unnamed 52-year-old man nicknamed Sam returned to his apartment in Peoria, Illinois, to find his trombone, which he had stashed in a bedroom cupboard, had been ripped from its canvas case, the slide tossed aside, and the mouthpiece roughly jammed into the instrument. The parts, along with lubricants, were haphazardly thrust back into the case. Nothing else in the apartment appeared to have been touched. Adding to the mystery, there was no sign of forced entry. *Journal Star* (Peoria, Illinois), 15 Aug 2017

### First Settlers

In early January, a group of penguins set up home on Felixstowe beach in Suffolk, the first to ever settle naturally in the UK. The five Magellanic penguins – all adults and apparently healthy – were spotted on the pebbled beach close to the Spa Pavilion. It is likely they hitched a ride on a container ship from the Falkland Islands. Zoologists were not concerned for the penguins' welfare in the cold weather, but worried they would struggle in the heat of a Suffolk summer. *suffolkgazette.com*, 14 Jan 2018

## PSYCHIC STIMULATION

Partying with the placebo effect...



consumption increased responsiveness to the helmet.

"The study was conducted at a music festival, so that we could investigate a large number of intoxicated people. However, the amount of alcohol consumed was actually really low. People did not dare to combine alcohol with 'brain stimulation'. In future studies, we should test the effects of alcohol in a more controlled environment," said

According to a field study in the journal *Religion, Brain & Behavior*, some people report "extraordinary experiences" after wearing a skateboarding helmet with inactive wires attached to it. Dutch scientists took a so-called 'God Helmet' – a placebo brain stimulation device – to a music festival. "From previous studies, we knew that the God Helmet is able to elicit authentic extraordinary experiences (i.e. 'feeling of a presence' or 'out-of-body' experience) in a minority of the subjects we test," explained the study's author, David Maj. of Amsterdam University. "We wanted to examine what type of traits are associated with people who get extraordinary experiences and whether alcohol, by decreasing prefrontal regulation, would increase the percentage of people that are responsive to the God Helmet."

The researchers recruited 193 participants at Lowlands – a large three-day music festival – and measured their blood alcohol level. The participants were told the God Helmet would electromagnetically stimulate their brain to elicit spiritual experiences, and they were also hooked up to a variety of sham medical equipment that was never turned on. The helmet itself was "a transformed metallic-coloured skate helmet with wires attached to the back of a bogus analog to digital-box

### Scientists took a so-called 'God Helmet' to a music festival

which had a flickering light," the researchers explained.

Each participant sat blindfolded with the helmet on for 15 minutes and listened to white noise on earphones. They were able to click a computer mouse to indicate when they were having an extraordinary experience. The helmet elicited a wide range of experiences. Several participants reported strong bodily sensations, such as involuntary movements or a floating sensation. Many also reported seeing imagery and hearing voices. "I came loose from the chair, the chair fell and I was floating. The desk started to shake heavily and I felt the presence of a dark figure next to me. It whispered something in my ear that I could not understand," one participant told the researchers. Weak bodily sensations such as itches, dizziness, sleepiness and heart rate increases were also frequently reported. People who said they were spiritual believers were more likely than sceptics to have a response to the helmet. However, there was no evidence that alcohol

Maj. "In another study, which is currently under revision at the journal *Consciousness & Cognition*, we found that people who score high on absorption are especially responsive. Absorption is the tendency of some people to get fully immersed in external stimuli (e.g., watching a movie or listening to music) or internal stimuli (e.g., your own thoughts and sensations).

"Thus, what we expect is going on is that when people undergo the placebo brain stimulation suggestion (i.e. we tell them about research on the God Helmet, we wear lab coats, we show them an fMRI scanner and they see a movie about a professor relating her experiences with the God Helmet), some people get immersed/absorbed in this suggestion and come to experience more vividly what they are thinking. For example, you always have random fluctuating bodily sensations, but you are simply not aware of them. In combination with the context and sensory deprivation, you now come to interpret these bodily sensations in terms of our suggestion. With the God Helmet, research finally has a tool to investigate real-life 'extraordinary experiences' such as speaking in tongues or feeling the Holy Spirit in a controlled lab environment." *Psychostop*, 20 Jan 2018.






# A NOSTALGIC CELEBRATION OF HORROR, FRIENDSHIP...

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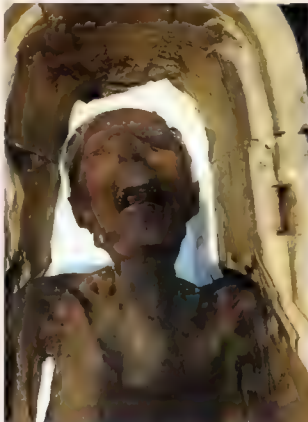




PAUL DEVEREUX, Managing Editor of *Time & Mind*, digs up the latest archaeological discoveries

## SCREAMING MUMMY WAS A DADDY KILLER

A male mummy with its mouth agape in a forever silent scream, found years ago in the Deir el-Bahari Valley of the Kings tomb complex in Egypt, was thought to be Prince Pentewere, tried and executed for his involvement in a conspiracy to murder his father, the pharaoh Ramses II (reigned 1186 – c.1155 BC), who had his throat cut (see my 2013 report, **FT300:23**). This identity has now been reinforced by DNA analysis. Being such a naughty young man, Pentewere was literally hung out to dry and so mummified naturally instead of undergoing the complex procedure of proper, honourable embalming, and instead of being covered in white linen, he was wrapped in sheepskin, considered impure. The mummy has its hands and feet bound with leather ropes, and evidence suggests Pentewere was poisoned. *Independent UK, Egypt Independent, 13 Feb 2018.*



LEFT: The screaming Prince Pentewere. BELOW: One of the stacked skulls from the Swedish burial site.

animal bones were placed on top of it in a particular order, with the human remains in the centre. Two skulls among those had pointed wooden stakes driven through them. The remains of at least 11 adults were placed on top of the grave (possibly secondary deposits), but, bizarrely, only one had a jawbone. The burial site did contain other jawbones, although none of them, except for a child's, was human. Go figure. "It's a very enigmatic structure," admitted co-lead researcher Fredrik Haegren, an archaeologist at the Kultura Heritage Foundation in Västerås. "We really don't understand the reason why they did this and why they put it under water." *LiveScience, 13 Feb 2018.*

## CARE FOR THE DISABLED

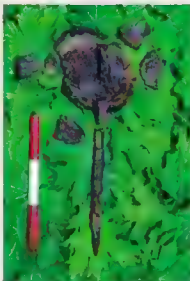
And now for happier news from antiquity. In Russia, at the so-called Sungir archaeological site, about 200km (124 miles) east of Moscow, are burials dating back about 34,000 years (Upper

## HUBBLE, BUBBLE

Archaeologists at a possible ritual and ceremonial centre at Glenfield Park, Leicestershire, have unearthed an intriguing collection of Iron Age objects. The trove includes 11 cauldrons, fine ring-headed dress pins, a brooch and a cast copper alloy object known as a 'horn-cap', which may have been part of a ceremonial staff. The cauldrons had been arranged (some upside down) in a large circular ditch, as if ritually closing off that part of the site. One of the vessels has raised stem and leaf motifs on it, similar to the so-called 'vegetal style' of Celtic art, generally dated to the 4th century BC. John Thomas, director of the excavation and Project Officer from the University of Leicester Archaeological Services, said: "The importance of cauldrons as symbolic objects is reflected in their frequent appearance in early medieval Irish and Welsh literature." *Announced by University of Leicester, 27 Nov 2017.*

## STAKEHOLDERS

Archaeologists have found an 8,000-year-old grave in Sweden that in prehistory would have been at the bottom of a lake. (The location is now a boggy, forested area.)



The former underwater burial site had been built by placing large stones and wooden stakes close together, making a flat structure measuring 39x46ft (12x14m). Human and

Palaeolithic). They represent one of the earliest records of modern *Homo sapiens* in Europe. Of particular interest is the burial of two young boys, aged about 10 and 12. They were interred head-to-head and accompanied by an extraordinarily rich array of grave goods, including carved artwork, over 10,000 mammoth ivory beads, more than 20 ambrams, about 300 pierced fox teeth, 16 ivory mammoth spears, and deer antlers (two human lower leg bones were also placed across the boys' chests). According to an analysis of their dental enamel, both boys experienced repeated periods of extreme stress. The 10-year-old's thighbones are described as "exceptionally bowed and short", but he would nevertheless have been physically mobile. The 12-year-old's teeth surprisingly had almost no wear, rare for dental conditions in that era. Analyses of his skeleton indicate that he was bedridden. It seems he was being cared for and fed soft foods, such as soups and cereals. While these kids were buried like veritable kings, the 10 adult burials at the site contained nowhere near such rich grave goods – indeed, some had none. *LiveScience, 13 Feb 2018.*



# CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

## 223: GENERALLY SPEAKING

"The PM [Churchill] said every prospective officer should follow General Gordon's advice and read Plutarch's *Lives*" – John Colville, *The Fringes of Power* (2002), p273.

In cause here is his biography of Quintus Sertorius (126-72 BC). Hardly a household name today. But he was in the Iberian campaign of Napoleon (himself an avid reader of Plutarch from boyhood), thanks to William Wordsworth, who in both his *Prelude* and *Spanish Guerrillas* invoked his name in praise of the Spanish resistance leaders against Bonaparte.

The poet had clearly been reading Plutarch's *Life*, characterised by Martin Murphy, 'To the Fortunate Isles: Sertorius and his legend, from Plutarch to Wordsworth,' TLS, 26 March 2014, as "The nearest thing to an adventure book for boys ever written by a Greek or Roman writer, a combination of TE Lawrence and Richard Hannay."

Sertorius has attracted violently opposite verdicts from historians. The mighty Theodor Mommsen (1882) hailed him as "One of the greatest men, if not the very greatest man that Rome had hitherto produced – a man who under more fortunate circumstances would perhaps have become the regenerator of his country." Under Mommsen's towering influence, Adolf Schulten published a panegyric (*Sertorius*, 1926). Violent opposition began with H Berve, 'Sertorius,' *Hermes* 64 (1929), 97-106, damning him as a treacherous renegade. The pendulum eventually swung back, thanks to Philip Spann's *Quintus Sertorius and the Legacy of Sulla* (1987), and CF Konrad's *Commentary* (1994).

Plutarch himself kicks off somewhat in *Boys' Own* style with a series of coincidences from the past, e.g. the two Attuses both killed by wild boars and the two Actaeons both torn apart by dogs, plus the reflection that the most warlike and crafty of generals – Philip, Antigonus, Hannibal – were all one-eyed, Sertorius qualifying by losing an eye in combat.

Sertorius's military and political careers were embroiled in the civil war between Marius and Sulla, extending to eastern offensives against Mithridates. He fought various battles both in Italy and North Africa, but Spain (hence Wordsworth's evocation in Napoleon's Iberian context) was his main theatre.

Despite winning early fame in a daring



spy mission against tribal enemies and being awarded the Grass Crown for bravery – Roman equivalent to the VC, awarded (Pliny, *Natural History*, bk22 ch4 para3) only nine times – Sertorius was seduced by some sailors' accounts of the Canary Islands as Homer's Fortunate Isles (again echoed in Wordsworth) into a desire to retire there to a carefree life.

No such luck. But he did find an exotic link with the past at Tingis, Libya, namely the tomb of Antaeus the famous mythic wrestler, containing a body 60 cubits long – the "dumbfounded" Sertorius had it reburied with sacrificial honours.

Another more useful romanticism came his way in Spain. He was presented by a commoner with a faun of unusual colour – pure white – which he represented to the credulous locals as possessing a direct link to the goddess Diana, who supplied him with vital military intelligence. This was swallowed whole, earning him a passionate following, the animal becoming a faun in the enemies' flesh. Martin Murphy plausibly suggests that this creature may have inspired Wordsworth's *The White Doe of Rylstone*.

His reputation was redoubled in the city of Osca, where he established a school for the local barbarian quality's sons, providing purple togas as the uniforms. To conciliate the adult Spaniards to Roman ways, he also established a local Senate of 300. Later on, though, this all turned sour in a revolt, as punishment for which

Sertorius killed a number of his school's pupils and sold the rest into slavery.

Hailed as 'The New Hannibal', Sertorius showed himself as tricky as the Punic leader when he defeated a local army by piling up a mound of loose ash soil and having the strong prevailing winds blow it back into the enemy's faces, blinding and choking them – an earthy character indeed.

Sertorius's successes naturally incurred the jealousy of other Roman officers, above all Marcus Perpenna Vento, who started plotting to liquidate him, taking fellow-officer Manlius as co-conspirator. Manlius, however, told his boyfriend about the scheme. The latter promptly told another of his lovers, Aufidius, already privy to the plot and roused by this – he despised Manlius – urged Perpenna to expedite the deed. Sertorius was tricked into accepting a dinner invitation by Perpenna. In deference to his moral probity, his hosts usually kept the proceedings respectable. But Perpenna's other guests, feigning drunkenness, tried to upset Sertorius by "indulging in obscene language and committing many indecent acts" Sertorius did not rise to the bait, merely lying back and ignoring them. Finally, Perpenna let drop a wine glass, its clatter the signal, and Sertorius was hacked to death by couch-mate Antonius and many others.

Perpenna soon got his come-uppance. Having attacked Pompey (the future 'Great'), a fiasco resulting in his capture, he sought to ingratiate himself by producing documents supposedly showing Sertorius to have been harbouring revolutionary designs. Pompey took the papers and without a glance made a bonfire of them and immediately executed Perpenna. The only survivor of the plot against Sertorius was Aufidius who "Either because people did not recognise him or ignored him, lived to old age in a barbarian village, destitute and despised" – classic Plutarchean moralising finale.

In his *Sertorius* (1662), Corneille makes his hero say: "Rome n'est plus dans Rome; elle est toute où je suis" – Rome is no longer in Rome; she is wherever I am. Martin Murphy ends his essay with the nifty idea that this, mutans mutandis, would have been the ideal quotation for General de Gaulle in his wartime London exile – certainly a nice bit of Gaul blather.

# Take a deep breath...

DAVID HAMBLING explains why the Russians have been plunging dachshunds into tanks of liquid

In December, Russia's Foundation for Advanced Research Projects (FPI in English), equivalent to the US military research organisation DARPA, showed a dachshund being submerged in liquid. The dog was understandably distressed but continued breathing under the surface. Afterwards it was returned to the air and, having coughed the liquid out of its lungs, breathed normally, apparently unharmed.

A video of the demonstration caused some outcry from animal welfare groups, though the researchers claimed it was "carried out in accordance with the ethical principles of using animals for biomedical research". Dmitry Rogozin, the Russian deputy prime minister who witnessed the demonstration, is a dog lover with a German Shepherd called Ponchik (Doughnut). Afterwards he reportedly adopted the dachshund, known as Nicholas.

The demonstration may look as bizarre as the 1930s Soviet experiments by Sergei Brukhonenko, keeping a severed dog's head alive. In fact, it's a modern revival of a technique developed some decades ago for a genuine requirement.

Liquid breathing could solve the problems of deep-sea diving. The deeper you go, the greater the pressure. As the diver comes up afterwards, the high-pressure nitrogen dissolved in their bloodstream comes fizzing out like a soda bottle shaken too vigorously, with deadly effects. This is 'caisson disease' and can only be countered by a slow process of depressurising – divers returning from the maximum 500m (1,640ft) need days in a decompression chamber, gradually returning to sea-level pressure. Liquid breathing overcomes this problem. Liquid is incompressible and will not enter the blood, so someone breathing oxygen-saturated liquid rather than high-pressure air could come up immediately with no ill effects.

America and Russia both experimented with this technique during the Cold War, but its lasting fame is mainly due to the 1989 movie *The Abyss*. At the climax, a character played by Ed Harris descends to extreme depth to defuse a nuclear warhead, aided by an experimental liquid breathing rig. Technical advice for *The Abyss* came from Thomas Shaffer, now Professor of Paediatrics at Sidney Kimmel Medical College, Thomas Jefferson University, and was based on his 1974 work with dogs.

One of the big hurdles to be overcome is inhaling liquid. There is a strong natural inhibition; it could be compared to an extreme form of waterboarding. Volunteers



LEFT Anton Tonshin, head of the FPI liquid breathing laboratory, holds Nicholas the dachshund.

involved in tests said that getting the liquid into their lungs was one of the most unpleasant aspects. Hence researchers started with anaesthetised subjects, and only working with one lung at first.

Initial attempts involved saline solution – salt water – charged with oxygen. A 1977 US Navy report on "The feasibility of liquid breathing in man" noted that this method did not provide sufficient oxygen, and the experimental subject would slowly suffocate. Temperature control was also an issue. The lung has a large surface area, and a flow of cold liquid through it rapidly cools the body. It is so effective that liquid ventilation is currently being explored at the University of Paris as a way of quickly lowering body temperature to put emergency patients into a state of 'hibernation'.

The first person to breathe liquid in the West was a commercial diver, Frank Falcjczyk, who inhaled oxygenated saline into one lung. Extracting the liquid was difficult, and he later developed pneumonia. Ejecting the liquid has always been problematic, partly because liquid is about a thousand times denser than air. One subject is reported to have broken a rib while coughing it up.

Oxygenated perfluorocarbons proved to be better at holding oxygen, but there was another problem – carbon dioxide. The new liquid delivered oxygen but did not take away the waste gas, resulting in what reports describe as "respiratory distress" and limiting breathing time to a few minutes.

Adding an emulsion of another liquid solved this and, in theory, allowed safe breathing.

The big unknown is how far the work was taken after the 1970s. It is not known whether full liquid ventilation of both lungs has been safely and reliably performed with humans. There are rumours that US divers tested liquid breathing equipment, but no tangible evidence. On the Russian side there are unofficial reports that aquanauts went to the unheard-of depth of nearly a kilometre and returned safely, being awarded "Hero of the Soviet Union" status. The project was supposedly shelved for lack of funding in the 1980s, but it is far from clear whether it ever took place.

Liquid breathing was always challenging, and unmanned underwater vehicles mean there is little demand now for extreme diving. In the West, there is still some experimental use of the technique for therapeutic purposes – treating lung conditions and supporting newborn babies – but not for diving. However, the Russian military have expressed interest in an emergency liquid ventilation system to return submariners to the surface after an accident. Hence, the work by the FPI and the Liquid Breathing Laboratory established at the Izmerov Research Institute of Occupational Health in Moscow in 2017. In the latest work, dogs have reportedly survived breathing liquid at a pressure equivalent to 500 metres (1,640ft) depth and returned safely without decompression. "All of the can't test divers have survived and feel well after 'submergence' and lengthy liquid breathing session," the FPI's deputy general director told TASS.

There may be more uses than rescuing stranded submarine crew. A liquid-breathing pilot would be more resistant to G-forces, so it might benefit fighter crew or astronauts. One study even looks at a liquid-breathing rig pilot for a railgun launch to space, like Jules Verne's cannon-launched Moon mission.

Despite the volume of work in Russia – Western scientists report seeing presentations on it in the 2000s – no scientific papers have been published. All we have to go on are news releases and demonstrations. However, a public demonstration before high-level guests suggests the researchers have a great deal of confidence that the technique works safely and reliably. So, while hard data is lacking, and while their other advances might be more questionable, this looks like an area of weird science in which Russia really is pushing ahead.



# ANIMAL WONDERS

The single-horned Icelandic ram that became an Internet sensation, plus 'Stuckie' the mummified dog of Georgia



## 'UNICORN' SAVED?

A single-horned ram found in Iceland was saved from the slaughterhouse last October. Einhyrnur (Icelandic for 'unicorn') was found in April 2017 among Eira Pórey Dálsdóttir's flock with his horns fused into one, and became an Internet sensation. As the *Iceland Monitor* reported, Einhyrnur was destined for the slaughterhouse. Reykjavík Zoo offered to take him, but Iceland's strict animal movement rules meant he couldn't go there, and his sale options were limited. However, the animal's future seems a little brighter with the news that he was to be auctioned for local charities in November. No further news of his fate has reached Fortean Towers. *BBC News*, 10 Oct 2017

## OAK-DRIED CANINE

Loggers chopping up an old chestnut oak in Georgia, US, in 1980 found a mummified dog in a hollow part of the trunk 28ft (8.5m) up. It is thought that the dog became trapped around 1960 after it ran into a hole at the bottom of the tree, chasing a small animal up the tree and getting itself lodged in the gap. Unable to escape or be rescued, the unfortunate canine starved to death. Instead of sending the tree off to the sawmill, the workers from Kraft Corporation donated it to Southern Forest World – a tree museum in Waycross, Georgia. The dog was dubbed 'Stuckie' after a naming contest in 2002.

Staff at the museum reckon the body mummified because an upward draft through the hollow tree created a chimney effect – carrying away the scent of the dead animal, which would usually attract insects and other organisms.

The tree also provided relatively dry conditions, whilst the oak's tannic acid – a natural substance that absorbs moisture and dries out its surroundings – helped to harden the animal's skin.

Brandy Stevenson, Forest World's manager, told *Roadside America*: "People always ask me, 'How did he get in there?' And I always say, 'Well, he was a hound dog. Maybe he was after

a raccoon.'" Stuckie can be seen at the Southern Forest World Museum and Environmental Center in Waycross, Georgia. (<http://southernforestworld.com/>) *Sun, Metro*, 6 Feb 2018.



SCOTT BRUNN SHUTTERSTOCK PERFECT PHOTOGRAPHY WOODRUS WORLD.COM

# The Romans in Britain: Part Two

ALAN MURDIE concludes his examination of Roman ghosts, and wonders where they all are...

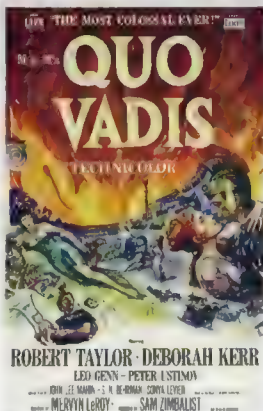
As mentioned in the previous column (**FT364.18-20**), in 2013 researcher Tony Percy raised with me various critical doubts concerning Harry Martindale's celebrated sighting of ghostly Roman soldiers beneath the Treasurer's House in York. It transpired these evidential doubts were shared by some other researchers who had failed to trace pre-1974 versions and records of the haunting. We also discussed the possibility that Martindale's experience in 1953 was inspired or influenced by images from cinema.

Independently, Jeremy Harte raised the same issue from a folklore perspective. Recorded hauntings attributed to ghostly Romans post date the wide dissemination of pictorial images in books and popular culture from the 19th century. Thus, until ideas of what Roman soldiers should look like were fixed, such apparitions were not observed, a "figure in armour" might have been the best description.

This absence of historic apparitions was noted by a member of a late 19th century Oxford ghost-hunting group to which Sir Charles Oman belonged. He recalled in 1946: "I never came across an apparition of a wood-painted Briton, of a Roman centurion, or of a mediaeval knight, or of an Elizabethan or Jacobean courtier or lady." (*The Old Oxford Phantasmagorical Society* in *Journal of the SPR* vol.33 1946, 213). This raises the question, were they even seen at all?

From the early 20th century, images of Romans became familiar from depictions in cinema, the years 1951-1954 (before and immediately after Martindale's experience) being vintage ones for Hollywood treatments of Ancient Rome. Films included *Quo Vadis* (1951), *Andracles and the Lion* (1952), *Julius Caesar* (1953), *The Robe* (1953), *Demetrius and The Gladiators* (1954) and *Sign of the Pagan* (1954), with such imagery reinforced by film posters and advertising. So could Harry Martindale's experience have been inspired or influenced by exposure to this?

It is important to realise the distinctions that may be drawn between inspiration and influence in this context. If inspired by



cinematic images, Martindale's Romans were hallucinatory from start to finish, having no existence outside his own brain. Such a view underpins psychosocial hypotheses in ufology, which postulate that cultural images generate hallucinations and misperceptions. The a priori tenets of this view are: (1) people see whatever they are culturally conditioned to perceive; (2) society imprints the imagery necessary in their brains; and (3) people are prompted into inventing fictional reports for perverse reasons of their own.

But if influenced by imagery, the possibility exists that Harry Martindale's vision, while hallucinatory, was one triggered by paranormal cognition, drawing upon images and symbols in culture but also generated by some external factor. Such was a theory of apparitions explored by researchers GNM Tyrrell in *Apparitions* (1942) and Hilary Evans in *Seeing Ghosts* (2000). Tyrrell speculated that a psychic signal of some kind was

LEFT: The Roman invasion of British cinemas in the 1950s might it have inspired Harry Martindale's experience?

received by way of telepathy or clairvoyance, which a component of the unconscious mind then arranges as a complex visual hallucination. Tyrrell and other researchers linked dream imagery with ghosts (see Andrew MacKenzie in *Ghosts and Apparitions*, 1982) and with other types of entity experience; this might be the same mental mechanism responsible for organ sign dreams. Thus, culturally derived images of Romans might play a part in creating experiences, but with some underlying paranormal cause. While Tyrrell recognised his hypothesis best fitted the crisis-type ghost attributed to telepathy, he was open to wider possibilities whereby popular tradition and symbols might supply material from collectively held 'idea patterns' obtained from multiple telepathic sources. In this way the wider community provides a mental image bank upon which psi powers draw (Tyrrell, 1942).

If this seems rather like having your hypothetical cakes and eating them, indeed it is. Psychosocial theories remain nebulous, their appeal owing much to convenience rather than actual evidence. The

same may be said for the trenchant concept of memes that has drifted from biological theory, an extension of neo-Darwinism, into cultural studies, and washes up in discussions on oral tradition. (See 'A Meme-Based Approach to Oral Tradition Theory' by Michael Drout, *Oral Tradition* 21.2, 2006, pp269-294.) Cultural memes are conceived as ideas replicating themselves somehow being copied from one human mind to another and spreading onwards. We list 11 all for inter-disciplinary studies, importing biological theories to explain social and cultural phenomena is a controversial and vexed area (see, for example intelligence testing in *The Mismeasure of Man*, 1981, by Stephen Jay Gould; 'Taking the Dawkins Challenge, or, The Dark Side of the Meme' by Gregory Schremp, *Journal of Folklore Research* vol.46, no.1, Jan-April 2009). While attractive as a metaphorical conceit or description, no one can actually identify the organic unit or processes involved in





ABOVE The churchyard of All Saints, Brenchley, in Kent, reportedly haunted by a lone Roman soldier.

transmission, or just how cultural ideas transform into seemingly real visual perceptions.

Alternatively, of course, one may freely postulate a personal symbolic element in Martindale's sighting. Could his vision have reflected an unconscious desire to be a policeman? In his later police career, he served as a member of a disciplined, uniformed and helmeted force patrolling the streets of York (and doubtless having to control more than his fair share of contemporary drunken barbarians) rather like the legions of 15 centuries previously – after all, did not American author Joseph Wambaugh use the title *The New Centurions* for his 1971 police novel? Such a vision might represent a symbolic unconscious fantasy or vision, or might have psychically linked him to the marching Romans of ancient times. There is no means of knowing.

Given the state of current theories about apparitions, believing we have answers on dualist or materialist lines is premature. There is no such thing as a simple hallucination, since we do not yet understand how consciousness works and creates ordinary perceptions, let alone seeing ghosts. We lack any model of how such hallucinations occur, just as we do not understand what orchestrates the contents of minds into the nocturnal pageants and pantomimes forming dreams. Simply labeling a manifestation does not explain it, and psychosocial explanations fail to account for some people seeing apparitions, but not others in the same culture.

As I have previously argued, despite

## The case also involved a strange apparition resembling a giant turtle seen in the grounds

the proliferation of traditional headless ghost stories in Britain, actual witnesses to decapitated spectres are scarce. Millions of cinema-goers and TV viewers have seen the glory that was Rome but no corresponding flood of Roman ghost sightings has followed. Furthermore, the phantom legionaries described by Martindale differed from cinematic depictions in 1953. Consequently, to discover how such things can be seen it is necessary to find out more about how our brains process images, and gather more examples of those who have witnessed, or believe they have witnessed, Roman apparitions.

Unfortunately, at this juncture we have to ask, "Where are the Roman ghosts?" for there are very few published first-hand accounts to purely spontaneous sightings like that by Martindale. By requiring a sighting to be spontaneous (i.e. unlooked for) I am excluding mediums claiming to channel Roman spirits, planchette communications and figures in the guise of Romans who are recognised as someone else. Thus, I omit such oddities as a Roman Centurion 'in the Tenth Legion' who purportedly communicated at a séance at Borley Rectory in 1938 (*The End of Borley Rectory*, 1945, by Harry Price): the wholly

remarkable visions of a local medium concerning Roman and other spectres at Great Livermere, Suffolk (*Friends, Romans and Ghosts*, 2004, by Beryl Dyson) and the Jewish lady who saw her deceased uncle dressed up as a Roman Senator after retiring to bed and turning out the lights ('On the paucity of apparitions in Jewish contexts and the cultural source theory for anomalous experience' by Christopher M. Moreman, *Journal of the SPR*, 2013, vol. 77, p. 129).

Local ghost experts confirm this lack of named witnesses. Concerning a segment of the Icknield Way in Hertfordshire, Damien O'Dell, author of *Paranormal Hertfordshire* (2009), reports an absence of identifiable witnesses to phantom legions along the Icknield Way near Miswell (personal comms, 1 and 3 Mar 2018). Regarding the Icknield Way, James McHarg stated only that "a young couple" sitting in a car along the ancient trackway in 1961 apparently both saw and heard ghostly legionaries. This reference was only in passing, within a discussion of a Scottish phantom battle case, but the manifestation was supposedly repeated a few months later to a party of men and women. ('A Vision of the Aftermath of the Battle of Nechtanesmere AD 685' by James McHarg in *Journal of the SPR*, 1978, vol. 49, no. 778, citing an article 'They Tell of Fighting Phantoms' by M. Letheringham, *General Practice*, 25, 6 Nov 1970, which I have not seen). At Hadrian's Wall, Darren Ritson, author of *Haunted Northumbria* (2009), informs me the only first-hand report he has obtained comes from a visiting medium, and thus not a spontaneous sighting. (Pers. comm., 28 Feb 2018).

Currently, the 14 people who reported a Roman soldier hovering 2ft (60cm) off the ground at Thorncomb Wood at Higher Bockhampton, Dorset, on 13 October 1969 are unidentified, other than they included a group of borstal boys on a work programme (*Ghosts of Dorset, Devon and Somerset*, 1974, by Rodney Legg, Mary Collier and Tom Perrott). Similarly, we have no named witnesses for the lone Roman soldier (possibly a Roundhead) at All Saints Churchyard, Brenchley (*Haunted Kent Today*, 1997, by Andrew Green) or for phantom legionaries marching over a roundabout near Cleaveland Castle, Forest of Dean (*Weekend Hants*, 1994, by Robin Mead). Plenty of hearsay, but a lack of first-hand testimony.

Even when witnesses to Roman phantoms are named, they may prove to be inventions, e.g. 'Lord Percival Durand' at Wroxham Broad, Norfolk, imagined by Charles Sampson for *Ghosts of the Broads* (1931, 1973). This has not prevented wider diffusion of the story in ghost books or even efforts by sceptics to 'solve' them (the Wroxham ghosts were needlessly

'explained' as hallucinations induced by marsh-gas. (*Unsolved Mysteries: A Collection of Weird Problems*, 1974, Valentine Dyall, Larry Forrester and Peter Robinson).

Certain aspects of accounts of a haunting at a property near Roman remains south of Cambridge detailed by Tony Cornell in his book *Investigating the Paranormal* (2002) are more evidential, but much of the significant material relies upon statements from a Japanese medium. The case also involved a strange apparition resembling a giant turtle seen in the grounds by workmen. Cornell concluded it might have been a vision of a detachment of Roman legionaries throwing up a protective mantle of shields around themselves.

Uncanny reputations at various sites that pre-date archaeological finds of Roman cemeteries e.g. 'Heaven's Walls' Lillingdon, Cambridgeshire (*Folklore as a Historical Science*, 1908, by GL Gomme); Icklingham, Suffolk (*The Icklingham Papers*, 1901, by Henry Prigg) and Recluse, Kent (*Reader's Digest Folklore Myths and Legends of Britain*, 1973) may confirm only previous discoveries or persistent folk memory. For example, a 'Roman Centurion' who appears in woodland at Bembridge, Isle of Wight, is a garbled local memory of the lost church of 'St Unan' (*A Natural History of Ghosts*, 2012, by Roger Clarke).

Some apparitions labelled 'Roman' cannot be conclusively dated as such – e.g. the 'man dressed in black and wearing a cloak, who can walk through walls' near the morgue of Royal Hospital in Derby could be from any period in the last 1,600 years, lacking any connection with a nearby Roman road ('Get in the exorcist Ghost of dead Roman soldier seen near brand new hospital's morgue', *D.Mall*, 30 Jan 2009).

Similarly, the dating of purely auditory phenomena attributed to haunting Romans is guesswork: e.g. footsteps at Lympce Castle, Kent, heard ascending steps to the castle but never returning (*Haunted Britain*, 1973, by Hynesley Cox, London Evening News, 7 Mar 1967). The stomping legionary' haunting the George & Dragon, Chester (*Ghosts of the North*, 1976, by Jack Hallam) or footsteps at Caesar's Camp, Alma Lane, Hampshire. Such noises could be from any period (Alan Wood's *Military Ghosts*, 2010, alternatively ascribes the Caesar's Camp manifestation to a military messenger killed in 1815). The sound of clashing 'Roman' weapons heard at Great Albans might stem from another battle in 1461 (*Paranormal Hertfordshire*, 2009, by Damien O'Dell).

Ultimately, only a handful of published examples provide named witnesses. Ghostly legions favouring periods of bad weather have long been said to



ABOVE One might at least expect Roman ghosts at Hadrian's Wall, but there are only re-enactors.

wander Mersea Island in Essex (*The Restless Ghosts of Ladye Place and Other True Hauntings*, 1967, by Harry Ludlam). The Revd Sabine Baring-Gould probably embroidered the story of the sounds of phantom legionaries fighting outside his rectory on the Island (again, how would he distinguish them from warriors from any other pre-gunpowder era battle or skirmish?) but author James Wentworth Day stated that Mrs Jane Pullen, long serving landlady of the Peldon Rose Inn, had spoken in the 1920s of encountering Roman ghosts on the causeway (*Essex Ghosts*, 1974). The last sighting appears to have been in 1970 mentioned in a short report, 'The Strood Centurion Walks Again' in the *Essex County Standard* for 13 February that year. Much of this press report is actually devoted to Mrs Pullen's experiences 50 years earlier, but it mentions how two men recently travelling to West Mersea encountered a strange white mist, the appearance of which made one witness think of 'the metal 'skirt' of a Roman tunic.' The article identifies them as Mr D Jordan of Mill Road and Mr Bert Mussett of Melrose Road, West Mersea.

One other published example involving a named witness is one that occurred in Norfolk in summer 1980. This was the experience of Griselda Cann of Faversham, who like the witnesses on Mersea Island was driving at night, seeing what appeared to be a column of Roman soldiers in a field by the roadside. I was alerted to her experience through a brief mention of it in the introduction to her book *Haunted Faversham* (1995). On contacting her in November 2011 she told me: 'I could see perhaps 30 or 40 of them, strung out. I had the impression that was just part of a longer line. They were walking from my right

to my left. They could have been hikers, or long-distance walkers, and initially my thought was that they had a long way to go to get somewhere, and anyway what were they doing walking along in the mist when they could be on the lane further up the field, where I was? It took me just a moment to think 'Romans!' What made me think that was that I could see the middle part of their legs were bare... they all had a reddish, brownish clothing, and their skin was dark and tanned looking, and some had metal over-clothing of some kind and most had staves and some had bundles on their backs. They looked utterly exhausted.' With considerable luck Griselda Cann stopped her car and got out to see what was happening. No one was to be seen. (Pers.comm., 28 Nov 2011).

Her sighting occurred in Norfolk, south of Narford, near the Peddar's Way, close to the site of an old Roman road but, after 30 years, she was unable to pinpoint the exact location. Nonetheless, there are many fascinating features to this sighting including how, as Martindale mentioned with his sighting, the figures looked 'utterly exhausted'. But I must also record one other very forlorn feature of her sighting. In the course of later correspondence with Griselda Cann I learned her married name is Griselda Mussett – the same surname as one of the pair of witnesses to the Roman ghost on Mersea Island in 1970. Of French Huguenot origin, the surname Mussett is long recorded around Mersea Island, but her husband appears to have no ancestors from the area. Whatever may be made of it, the fact that two independent witnesses to ghostly Romans turn out to share the same uncommon surname is a rather striking coincidence, given the extreme rarity of such sightings.



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# HEAVENLY MISSILES

Falling ice in Kew and California, blue snow in St Petersburg, rains of fish in Texas... and a flying sheep



ABOVE: The moment a huge block of ice crashed down on a London street, narrowly missing Serhiy Mysekhov, captured on CCTV.

● A 44lb (20kg) ice block fell from the sky and hit North Road, near Kew Gardens station in southwest London, on 7 February. Street cleaner Serhiy Mysekhov was working feet away, on the opposite side of the road. Amir Khan, 39, who had stopped near the incident in his car, managed to capture the dramatic moment on his car's security camera at 9.08am. "It made such a loud noise like a meteorite crashing down," he said. "The street cleaner was so confused and scared." The ice came down underneath a busy flight path to Heathrow Airport, but a Civil Aviation Authority spokesman said: "Although ice does very occasionally fall from aircraft, it can also be the result of meteorological phenomena. We receive around 30 reported ice falls every year, although we are not certain how many of these incidents are the result of ice falling from an aircraft." *metro.co.uk*, 9 Feb, *D Telegraph*, *D Mail*, 10 Feb 2018.

● Claudell Curry, 82, his wife were enjoying a quiet evening at home in San Bernardino, California, on 10 December 2017 when a horrible crashing sound came from their bedroom. They found chunks of clear ice lying and debris from their ceiling

littering the room. It probably would have been more traumatic had the ice been blue, from the chemicals added to plane lavatories to reduce odour and break down the waste. Since the San Bernardino ice was clear as in other unexplained megacryometeor cases, its origin isn't so easy to identify. A similar case happened just a month earlier only a few dozen miles away when another deadly chunk of ice fell through a home in Chino, California. The FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) wasn't able to identify a source for either case, as there were no commercial flights in the area on either date. The nearby March Air Reserve Base, Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, and Camp Pendleton also denied responsibility. *mysteriousuniverse.org*, 15 Dec 2017.

In 2005, meteorologists collected reports of 40 cases of megacryometeor falls around the world since 1999. They suggested that these ice bombs occur in the upper atmosphere by a process analogous to hail formation inside thunderstorms, and that global warming is causing the lower part of the atmosphere – the troposphere, where we live – to expand and rise. This means

that the tropopause, the so-called roof of the troposphere, is forced to a greater height, where it cools more than normal. Thus the new, steeper temperature difference between warm and cold air in the upper atmosphere generates turbulent up-and-down winds that repeat the hail-formation process, but without a thunderstorm.

Documented references to ice falls go back two centuries, long before powered flight: for example, 2kg (4.4lb) of ice in Cordoba, Spain, in 1829, and 1kg (2.2lb) of ice in New Hampshire in 1851. Probably the best documented was a 2kg chunk with 51 layers of ice that nearly brained meteorologist RF Griffiths in Manchester on 2 April 1973 [FT13:9]. For other megacryometeor reports, see FT82:43, 132:6, 133:66, 140:66, 214:25, 321:8.

● On 9 January, Dawn Scarpulla heard a loud noise and found yellow ice on her roof. It broke apart and cracked her ceiling. "When we put the pieces together it was like a five- to six-foot (1.5-1.8m) piece of ice, so it was big," she said. She stashed a sample in her garage freezer for analysis. As her house is under the flight path to O'Hare International Airport, she

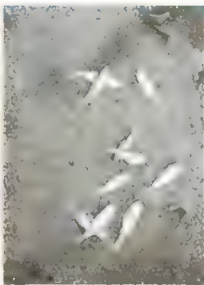
thought the ice had come from a plane – although the FAA said this was unlikely. *CBS Chicago*, 9 Jan 2018.

● On 20 January, a 10-12kg (22-26lb) chunk of ice fell on Fazlipur Badi village in the northern Indian state of Haryana, causing a "big thud". Senior Gurgon official Vivek Kalia said a sample had been sent for analysis, but he and his colleagues had a strong suspicion that it was frozen airline excrement. "Some villagers thought it was an extraterrestrial object," he said. "Others thought it was some celestial rock and I've heard that they took samples home." A senior official of the Indian Meteorological Department, who examined a small sample, said the projectile was "definitely not a meteorological phenomenon".

In January 2016, a woman in central Madhya Pradesh state suffered a severe shoulder injury when she was hit by a football-sized chunk of ice that crashed into the roof of her house. This was also thought to be frozen airline waste. *BBC News*, 22 Jan 2018.

● Blue snow covered the ground in St Petersburg, Russia, in mid-December. Residents worried that it could have been due to toxic chemicals, possibly a result of the demolition of the city's chemical-pharmaceutical research institute. Experts said the colours could have been caused by cobalt, a metallic element, or methylene blue, a substance used in some medical treatments. Samples were taken for analysis. In February 2015, blue snow fell in the Russian city of Chelyabinsk, some 1,500 miles (2,400km) to the east of St Petersburg, and was found to be due to food colouring used in Easter eggs. The dye had got into the ventilation system of a factory and been spread all over the area. *dailymail.co.uk*, 27 Dec 2017.

● Dana and Ryan Metz's house in Fulshear, Texas, was bombarded with fish that rained



**ABOVE:** Photographs of some of the fish that fell on 16 January, passed by the residents of Fulshear, Texas, to Paul Cropper. **BELOW:** Russell Hogg and the flying flounder.

down at about 3.20pm during an ice storm on 16 January. The family collected about 15 fish, some from their swimming pool. In all, about 10 neighbours in the Cross Creek Ranch subdivision near Fulshear discovered fallen fish, across an area roughly three quarters of a mile by half a mile (1,200m x 800m). Several residents went out photographing and filming the fish, and updating their Facebook pages. One told FT correspondent Paul Cropper that she had found 100 fish in her yard. At least 130 fish fell – possibly a lot more. They were identified by an ichthyologist as threadfin shad, *Dorosoma petenense*. One was photographed on a roof and another on a windowsill, one witness actually saw three fish raining down. There was a strong north wind blowing during the storm, and the Metzes and their neighbours speculated that the fish were scooped up from two small ponds to the north of their homes, but Paul Cropper contacted Dan Reilly, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Houston, who commented, “Radar shows no thunderstorms, really just stratiform precipitation (mostly sleet/ice pellets). Waterspouts, tornadoes would not make sense at all from the meteorology of the day, and no hint of any rotation or anything odd on radar. It remains a mystery as far as I’m

concerned.” A marine biologist suggested the fish could have been disgorged by birds such as herons or cormorants, but none of the fish appeared even partially digested, and the large area of piscine precipitation argued against this explanation.

Another witness contacted Paul to report further dead fish in her back yard and porch on 14-15 February. These were of a different species, larger in size and showed signs of damage. Paul concluded that, in this case at least, birds such as migratory pelicans (seen at a lake in the area), may well have been responsible. [chick2houston.com](http://chick2houston.com), 17 Jan; [thefortean.com/2018/02/12/fulshear,the-fortean.com/2018/02/22/more-fish-fall-at-fulshear](http://thefortean.com/2018/02/12/fulshear-the-fortean.com/2018/02/22/more-fish-fall-at-fulshear).

• A large flounder landed on a Russell Hogg’s head as he relaxed in Parnell Baths, a spa pool in Auckland, New Zealand, on 13 January. Mr Hogg, originally from Portsmouth in England, is director of fire protection company the Fire Guys. Feeling a thwack on the side of his head, he thought someone had done an unruly belly flop or that something had been thrown at him. Then he saw a black shape sink to the bottom of the pool and pulled out a large flounder weighing a couple of kilos. It flapped around a bit before expiring. Given the power with which it hit him, it must have been travelling at a very high speed. The only explanation he could muster was that it had been

dropped by a large, high-flying bird. After taking a few pictures he threw it over the wall for the seagulls to eat. *New Zealand Herald*, 13 Jan 2018.

• James Hill, 26, an engineer resident in Whitstable, Kent, was in the kitchen at lunchtime on 15 February, making a cup of tea, when his father Colin came in to announce that there was a 2ft (60cm)-long small-spotted catshark lying dead on the lawn. The pair believe it was picked up by an over-ambitious cormorant or herring gull that dropped it in mid-flight. “It was in pretty good condition, but had been dead for a couple of days,” said James. (How could he tell? Some locals thought the story a bit fishy.) Small-spotted catsharks live in shallow waters off Britain and Norway, in the Mediterranean and off the coast of East Africa. They have slender bodies, blunt heads and sandpaper-like skin. [kentonline.co.uk](http://kentonline.co.uk); *Metro*, Sun, 19 Feb 2018.

• A driver in central Washington State was hit by a flying sheep on 31 October 2017. He was near the town of Chelan when he saw a herd of bighorn sheep on the hillside above the road. One of the animals, a ewe, jumped and smashed the car’s windshield. The driver was not hurt and managed to pull his car over. The sheep died. *[AP]* 31 Oct 2017.





## GRAVE POSTPONEMENTS

Our periodic round-up of super-centenarians and their top tips for a long and happy life

Another generation of super-centenarians has been in the news since our last roundup [FT346:18-20]. The oldest person whose age is beyond doubt is still the Frenchwoman Jeanne Calment, who died in 1997 aged 122 years and 164 days, though (as usual) there are older claimants. Centenarians are constantly asked for the "secret" of their longevity, and their answers are frequently bizarre. Mary Charlton (104) of Newcastle insisted her longevity was down to a bacon sandwich every morning, while Mabel Glover (106) of Macclesfield said her secret was taking two aspirins every day. Kay Travis (107) of Sheffield drinks a daily glass of whisky and Lily Welch (100) of South Tyneside said a daily packet of pork scratchings was her "elixir of life". John Mansfield (108), possibly the oldest man in the UK before his death in 2016, put his longevity down to drinking vinegar. Grace Jones, a retired milliner from Broadway in Worcestershire, turned 111 on 17 September 2017. She has had a glass of Scotch whiskey every night before bed for the last 58 years, and swears by it. According to her daughter, "She doesn't worry. She's always said, 'Worry doesn't do you any good at all'." Another Grace Jones was almost 114 when she died in 2013 [FT346:19]. *D.Express*, 2 Dec 2016; *Sun*, 25 May, 17 Aug; *D.Mirror*, 12 Aug, 19 Sept; *insulation.com*, 18 Sept; *Metro*, 22 Nov 2017

## THE LEAGUE TABLE

Those marked with an asterisk have had their longevity claims accepted by the Gerontology Research Group in Los Angeles and *Guinness World Records*. The minimum requirement is official documentation from before the claimant turns 20

## MBAH GOTOH, 146+

Saparmat Sodimedjo, aka Mbah Gotoh ("Grandpa Gotoh"), died in his hometown of Sragen in central Java on 30 April 2017. According to his papers, he was born on 31 December



LEFT: Mbah Gotho celebrating his 146th birthday in December 2016.

1870. Even though Indonesia only started recording births in 1900, officials insisted his residency card, which had his birth date on it, was valid, based on documents and interviews with him. A heavy smoker until the end, he outlived four wives, 10 siblings and all his children. His last wife died in 1988. In his village, he was a local hero famous for telling great stories about the wars against Japan and the Dutch colonisers. One of his earliest (alleged) memories was watching the opening of the Gondang sugar factory in 1880, when he was 10. "Life is only a matter of accepting your destiny wholeheartedly," he said. "I have wanted to die for a long time." He was buried close to the graves of his children. His tombstone had been ready, leaning against his house, for 24 years. The oldest man who ever lived, whose age is verified, is Jiroemon Kimura from Japan, who died on 12 June 2013, aged 116 years and 54 days.

## CELINO VILLANUEVA JARAMILLO, 121+

When Marta Ramirez agreed at the age of 63 to take in a destitute nonagenarian, she did not see it as a long-term imposition. His house had burned down, he had no one else and he looked frail. "He was 99, I didn't think he'd be around that much longer," Ramirez recalled. She is now 85, and her long-term guest, Celino Villanueva Jeramillo, is 121 – probably the world's oldest living

### He was a local hero, famous for telling stories about the wars

man. He lost his birth certificate in the fire, but the birth date on his ID card reads 1896. "Checking our records, Celino Villanueva Jeramillo was effectively born on 25 July 1896," said Jacqueline Salinas, one of the heads of the demographic department at Chile's Office of Statistics. (We do wonder what that "effectively" means.) Jaramillo was born in the town of Ruo Bueno. For the last 30 years or so of his working life, he was an agricultural labourer for a landowner, Ambrosio Toledo, who dismissed him when he turned 80. He moved to the coastal village of Mehuin, renting a shack with a dirt floor and a fireplace in the middle, over which he would hang his fish to smoke (a loose ember set the shack alight).

## DHARAM PAL SINGH, 119+

According to his passport, Indian farmer Dharam Singh was born on 6 October 1897, which would have made him 119 when he hoped to fly to Perth in order to run in the World Masters Athletics Championships in October 2016. He had paid his entry fee, but did not have money

to buy an airline ticket. He said his longevity secret was milk, herbal chutney and seasonal fruit. He avoided butter, fried food, sugar, tobacco, alcohol, tea, and coffee. He began running while herding cows as a teenager, and still tried to run four to five kilometres every day.

## \* VIOLET BROWN (NÉE MOSSE), 117 YRS, 189 DAYS

This mother of six was born in Jamaica on 10 March 1900 and died on 15 September 2017. She became the oldest verified living person on the death of Emma Morano (below). She credited her long life to eating cows' feet, not drinking rum and reading the Bible. Her son Harland Fairweather had died before her, on 19 April 2017, aged a mere 97. Following her death, her longevity title passed to a Japanese woman, Nani Tajima, born 4 August 1900. Another Japanese woman, Chyo Miyako, was born on 2 May 1901, while the Italian Giuseppina Proietto was born on 30 May 1902. Kristina Nagornaya from Ukraine claims to be 117.

## \* EMMA MORANO, 117 YRS, 137 DAYS

Emma Morano was born in Piedmont, Italy, on 29 November 1899 and died in Verbania on 15 April 2017. She lured out her violent husband in 1938, shortly after the death of their only child. She never married again and worked in a factory till she was 65. She has eaten three eggs every day (two of them raw) since she was 20, when a doctor recommended them to counter anaemia. She also ate small quantities of raw minced meat and enjoyed a regular glass of grappa. She outlived her eight brothers and sisters, including one who reached the age of 102

## \* ADELE DUNLAP, 114 YRS, 55 DAYS

Following the death of Goldie Michelson (113) of Worcester, Massachusetts, in July 2016,

# MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

## 222: TRUFFLE PIGS



### The myth

If you're going truffle-hunting, be sure to pack a pig. Sows, in particular, are the favoured animal for detecting the priceless underground fungi.

### The "truth"

Using pigs to find truffles has been illegal in Italy since 1985, because of the damage they caused while rooting for the fragile delicacy, which led to a near collapse of the industry. It's certainly true that pigs were commonly used in the past; their great advantage is that they don't need training. Truffles have evolved to smell irresistible (sexually irresistible, as it happens) to various animals, including pigs. The great disadvantage of pigs as truffle hunters is that they can't be trained, once they get the scent, nothing will stop them, and they're more likely to eat the valuable fungus rather than stand to one side obediently while you dig it out. Dogs, on the other hand, can be trained to sniff out truffles just as they would cannabis or explosives, in exchange for a treat and a kind word. Another reason dogs are now used almost exclusively is that human truffle-hunters guard their secret sites from each other, and walking a dog through the woods is more discreet than walking a pig. And, obviously, dogs are easier to transport around the countryside than big, randy sows.

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### Disclaimer

We're not saying pigs are never used to hunt truffles, only that almost all truffles today are found by dogs. If you have evidence to the contrary, please unearth it, wrap it in tissue paper, and send it in

### Mythchaser

All of which makes us think... the title "Most expensive ingredient in the world" is applied loosely, frequently and variously by journalists, cookery writers and publicists alike. Saffron, truffle, hot shoots, and others are nominated – but are any of them winners? Is there an unimpeachable scale which can produce a universally accepted answer?



Adele Dunlap was recognised as the oldest person in the US. She was born in Newark, New Jersey, on 12 December 1902, and died in Flemington, NJ, on 5 February 2017, whereupon the US longevity title passed to Delphine Gibson (113) of Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania.

#### \* YISRAEL KRISTAL

113 YRS, 330 DAYS

Yisrael Kristal celebrated his bar mitzvah in Haifa, Israel, on 6 October 1916, his birthday in the Hebrew calendar, in the presence of his two surviving children, along with grandchildren and nearly 30 great-grandchildren. The Jewish coming-of-age ceremony was a century late, it had not taken place in 1916 because his mother had died three years earlier, while his father had been drafted into the Russian army and in 1919 died of typhus.

Yisrael was born Izrel Icek Krysztal in Maleniec, near Zarnow in what is now Poland, on 15 September 1903 and was recognised as the world's oldest man by *Guinness World Records* in March 2016. The odds had been massively stacked against his survival (see **FT346:20**). He became a master confectioner in Łódź, married Chaja Feige Frucht in 1928 and had two children. In 1940 the Nazis moved the family to the Łódź ghetto, where the children died. In 1944, Yisrael and Chaja were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where Chaja was murdered. Yisrael survived as a slave labourer there and in other camps before being liberated by the Red Army in 1945, when he weighed just 37kg (82lb). He thanked his rescuers by making them sweets.

Yisrael returned to Łódź, married another Holocaust survivor, and in 1950 moved to Haifa with his second wife and their son. Here he built up another confectionary business, sired a daughter, and died on 11 August 2017. He enjoyed daily helpings of pickled herring and as a younger man in his 80s had a taste for wine and beer. His daughter Shula Kuperstoch said: "Despite all that he went through... he always saw only light and good in everything."

#### FRANCISCO NUNEZ OLIVERA

113 YRS, 47 DAYS

This man might have been the world's oldest on the death of Yisrael Kristal, but he was not recognised as such by the Gerontology Research Group, as his birth records were destroyed during the Spanish Civil War. He was born, allegedly, on 13 December 1904 in the village of Bienvenida in Badajoz, south-west Spain, and died on 29 January 2018, in the same village. The retired farmer had four children, nine grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren. He fought in the Rif War in the early 1920s between Spain and the Berber tribes in Morocco, and went out for daily walks alone until he was 107. He started to read again aged 98 after a cataract operation, one of only two occasions he went to hospital. Relatives attributed his longevity to a diet based on vegetables he grew himself and a daily glass of red wine. His regular breakfast was sponge cake made with olive oil and a glass of milk. He was known as Marchena because of his likeness to a Spanish flamenco singer who used that stage name, and was one of 30 people over the age of 90 among the 2,300 inhabitants of Bienvenida.

His title of world's oldest man passed to Masazou Nonaka, who was born on 25 July 1905. Last December saw the death of Don Jesus Castillo Rangel in Mexico, allegedly at the age of 121, and in March 2016 came news of a Brazilian called Joao Coelho de Souza, who was 131, according to his birth certificate.

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## NECROLOG

Goodbye to the co-discoverer of the comet that inspired the Heaven's Gate suicides and the co-author of seminal books on the folklore of childhood

### THOMAS BOPP

Bopp was an amateur astronomer who shared the honours with Alan Hale, a professional astronomer, for the discovery of Comet C/1995 O1, better known as Comet Hale-Bopp, which put on a grand show in the spring of 1997. Bopp, an Arizona construction company manager by day, first saw the comet on the night of 23 July 1995 when he and a friend were observing the star clusters in the vicinity of the constellation Sagittarius with a homemade 17.5in reflector telescope. He reported the finding to the Central Bureau for Astronomical Telegrams in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the clearing house for newly discovered space objects. The next day, the bureau called to confirm that Bopp had indeed discovered a previously unknown comet, but told him that Alan Hale had reported seeing it at about the same time in New Mexico. Nearly two decades had passed since a good visible comet had graced the skies, and it soon became clear that Hale-Bopp, with an icy core some 25 miles (40km) in diameter, was a big one – bigger than Halley's Comet and

more than four times the size of the comet that is thought to have crashed into Earth 65 million years ago to hasten the demise of the dinosaurs. It was estimated that Hale-Bopp's trajectory had last brought it to the inner Solar System 4,200 years ago, when Stonehenge was under construction.

In the months before it became visible to the naked eye in May 1996, Hale-Bopp caught the public imagination. An early image contained what appeared to be a companion – a "Saturn-like object" with streaks coming out of the sides – interpreted by some as an alien spaceship (in fact a well-known star whose image had been distorted by the camera). Further "evidence" of alien involvement was a "course correction" by the comet as it passed by Jupiter; in fact, all comets that pass Jupiter get pushed into new orbits by the planet's gravity. On 26 March 1997, four days after Hale-Bopp made its closest approach to Earth, 39 members of the Heaven's Gate religious cult in California committed suicide in the hope of being transported to an alien spaceship flying behind the comet (FT99:4;

100:4, 34-41; 103:45; 104:57). On 1 April 1997 Hale-Bopp shone brighter than any star except Sirius, and its dust tail stretched 40-45 degrees across the sky. Its arrival turned out to be bittersweet for Bopp. As it reached its brightest point, his brother and sister-in-law were killed in a car accident after photographing the comet. "This has been the best week of my life – and the worst," Bopp told a reporter.

Thomas Bopp, comet spotter, born Denver, Colorado 15 Oct 1949; died 5 Jan 2018, aged 68.

### IONA OPIE

With her husband Peter, Iona Opie was one of the world's greatest experts on the folklore, games and beliefs of childhood. Their book *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (1959) described "the greatest of savage tribes – the worldwide fraternity of children". Shortly after they got married in 1943,

they saw a ladybird during a walk. Recalling the rhyme "Ladybird, Ladybird, fly away home", they wondered where it had originated and discovered that the only available anthology of nursery rhymes had been published in 1842. Two children later, their *Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* (1951) was hailed as a major reference work. They found that many rhymes, hitherto believed to be English, have counterparts in nearly every country in the world. "Ladybird, Ladybird", for example, is known in some form almost everywhere – including Chma. Humpty Dumpty is "Boule Boule" in France, "Lille Trille" in Denmark and "Humpelken

Pumpelken" in Germany. Subsequent works included *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (1959), *Children's Games in Street and Playground* (1969), *The Oxford Book of Children's Verse* (1973), *Classic Fairy Tales* (1974), and *A Nursery Companion* (1980). Iona carried out most of the field interviews and research for their books, while Peter did most of the writing. He called her "Old mother shuffle paper".

The Opies discovered a conservative, tradition-bound society-within-society, its customs, practices and beliefs unshaken by the adult world over many centuries. They found that a high proportion of

children's activities are controlled by traditional folklore – the rules of the games they play; the codes of honour to which they subscribe; the jokes they tell; the pranks they play; and even the tortures they inflict. All are based on

long-standing oral traditions. "Barley", a common "truce" term in the North West (used by children to guarantee immunity from their tormentors) derived from the "barley" of the 14th-century poem, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Counting-out rhymes such as "Zeny meeny miney mo" have origins in Celtic numerals. Games like Blind Man's Buff, Hide and Seek and Tug-o'-war were played in Plato's Greece; ancient Egyptian children knew the finger-flashing game of Scissors, Paper, Stone. The evidence of children's fidelity to oral tradition was an important and original discovery that has had an impact on our understanding



ABOVE: Comet-hunters Alan Hale (left) and Thomas Bopp (right)

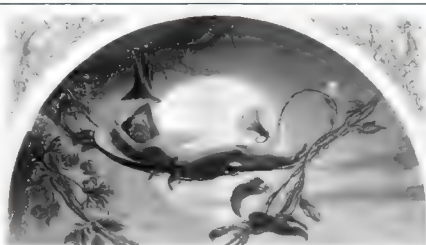


of children's psychological development.

The best-loved playground rhymes, the Opies discovered, are either bloodthirsty or rude. The fat, ugly or unpopular are universal targets of childish cruelty: "I'm a kid, you're a goat, you smell and I don't", as are non-conformists: "Protestant, Protestant, quack, quack, quack Go to the devil and don't come back." Teachers are a general butt of ridicule: "Sir is kind and sir is gentle Sir is strong and sir is mental." Young children, the Opies suggested, have a secret "tribal" language and set of customs that they seem to expunge from their memory when they become adolescent, but which give them more in common with their contemporaries in Timbuktu than with the adults of their own society.

After Peter Opie's sudden death from a heart attack in 1982, Iona carried on with their work under his name as well as her own. The *Oxford Book of Narrative Verse* (1983) was followed by *The Singing Games* (1985), *Babies, an Unsentimental Anthology* (1990) and *Children's Games with Things* (1997). She was sole author of *Tail Feathers from Mother Goose* (1988) and *The People in the Playground* (1993), as well as joint author of *The Treasures of Childhood and A Dictionary of Superstitions* (both 1989). The Opies assembled the largest private collection of children's books in the world, 20,000 of which (worth £1m) were bought for half price by the Bodleian Library in 1988. Iona was made CBE in 1999. In 2005 she said her recreation was "opismathy" (education late in life). Her children James, Robert and Letitia survive her.

*Iona Margaret Balfour Archibald, afterwards Opie, folklorist and historian, born Colchester 13 Oct 1923, died Petersfield, Hampshire 23 Oct 2017, aged 94.*



## FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTIANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

Could there have been a small mermaid colony in northern Scotland c. 1800? Certainly, there were an unusual number of mermaids reported at Reay on the northern coast at Caithness. Two letters written in 1809 describe sightings (see **FT357:56-57** for their possible influence on writer Thomas Love Peacock).

In the first, a young woman, her cousin and three other locals had watched a mermaid splash around for an hour in the sea. At one point the mermaid drove a bird away with its hand: something that is difficult to account for with reference to the usual suspects in mermaid sightings (seals with salmon in their mouths, stray walrus, and so on).

In a second letter a local man reported how, some years before, he had seen a mermaid in the same parish. He had watched a woman on a rock combing her hair only to realise that this 'woman' was a mermaid. He came so close, he claimed, that he was able to see the colour of her eyes (blue) – a detail that I have my doubts about!

What is particularly interesting here is that both the young woman and the man claimed that many others had seen mermaids in the same place. So why did these two sightings float to the top of the pile?

The simple answer is that the letter writers were 'respectable': the daughter of the local minister and a local schoolteacher. Fortians

today look for 'reliable' witnesses. By this, they mean members of the police, pilots, military personnel – men and women who, by virtue of their profession, might be expected to observe calmly and well. In the 19th century, 'reliable' witnesses meant people who came from the right social class: this snobbery comes up again and again in the voluminous writing from the 1800s on the Reay case. The

fact that one of the mermaids had been seen by a girl who had grown up in a manse mattered far more than the fact that there were four other witnesses that day!

It is a reminder that many 19th-century accounts were lost because they were the experiences of the great unwashed. Typically, the only time we hear about their supernatural experiences is when authors or newspapers consider their stories funny enough to print.

The Caithness mermaid story of 1809 briefly saw people take mermaids seriously: there was

interest in an unknown marine mammal. Two other mermaid sightings, one from the Hebrides and one from Grimsby, followed the Reay mermaids almost immediately into the news pages. The witnesses were simple fishermen. They would never have been reported had not a schoolmaster and a vicar's daughter led the way.

Simon Young's new book, *Magical Folk: British and Irish Fairies* (Gibson Square), is out now.

# A curate's egg on the Burnley Road

PETER BROOKESMITH surveys the latest fads and flaps from the world of ufological research

As promised (**FT360:28**), Alan Godfrey's book *Who or What Were They?* has been purchased, read twice, and here is a considered opinion.

Like the curate's egg, it's good in parts. Let's get the bad bits out of the way first. The typesetting is conspicuously amateur. Having been brought up with hot-metal setting and the craftsmen who came with it, this (a product of no training and the pitfalls of desktop publishing) drives me nuts. And then there's the Near English, as in: "The metalwork shook as it dipped beneath the Irish Sea and a circle closed in a cosmic symphony riddled with coincidence." Parse that, and despair, even before you try to pick that we'd metaphor apart. From geniuses to jobbing hacks, all authors need an editor (TS Eliot knew he did, so should you), and Oz Factor Books should at least have employed a decent proofreader before committing to print.

As to the story. There are two, possibly three, books struggling to fit into this one volume. One is Alan Godfrey's strange 'ufological' experience on Todmorden's Burnley Road in 1981 and its not very helpful hypnosis-induced epilogue. Another is Godfrey's biography and time as a beat policeman before the days of quotas, box-ticking and political correctness. This is simultaneously dispiriting and refreshing to read: how things have gone awry since the days of leaving Mr Plod to exercise common sense and his own judgement – but the way these blunt but devout Yorkshire coppers dealt with bright-spark new inspectors with daft new wheezes is both comic and righteous. Then there is the 'fall-out, and strange internal police politics, from Godfrey's 'UFO' encounter or, perhaps more accurately, from the attention and publicity he had because of it. Granted, these strands are not always wholly distinct, but a greater separation and reintegration would have made a better-structured, and ergo easier to follow, story.

Although we lack any other side of the story, it seems that Godfrey was indeed persecuted as a result of his strange experience and, in bailing him, on some occasions one hand of the police hierarchy didn't know what the other was doing, so he would be forbidden to speak about UFOs one day, then given permission to do so, then received a right bollocking for it the day after.



ABOVE A Futuro house; Alan doesn't think the one in Todmorden had any bearing on his close encounter

it doesn't seem to have occurred to Godfrey why the West Yorkshire Police brasshats wanted him to shut up and, preferably, be off the force. I'd imagine it was because they feared that should he one day have to appear as a key witness in a major case, a defence barrister would surely bring all this up to undermine his credibility. Nonetheless, his seniors seem to have had as much skill in man-management as a pig has in pole dancing, but without the porcine sense of humour. To his credit, Godfrey withstood their devout, deceitful bullying – albeit at the expense of veering dangerously near alcoholism – until a fracas aggravated an old injury and he retired on health grounds.

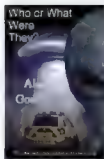
Which leaves us with his 'UFO' experience. Godfrey is almost reticent about this, although it's his main claim to fame. There is more informative detail about it in Jenny Randies's *The Pennine*

*UFO Mystery* (Granada, 1983), out of print, these many years. Godfrey seems to assume that his readers are already familiar with all that, which is a stretch, after so long. And he doesn't address any of the questions raised by fortresses, notably the detailed analysis of the case presented first at the FT UnCon in 2008 and printed, greatly expanded, in FT itself (**FT268:44-47** and **FT270:46-49**) in 2010/11. He does make a passing mention of the flying

saucer-shaped Futuro house in Todmorden: "That house would figure in my story years later and gave nocturnal pleasure flights over Tod – if you believe some of the more imaginative UFO skeptics!" This is as daft (and inaccurate) as the claim that critics say that 'flying lighthouses' were responsible for the Rendlesham Forest Incident. So Godfrey, however unintentionally, joins himself to the 'I know what I saw' brigade of UFO experients. In particular, he doesn't discuss his other visionary experiences, which are recounted in Jenny Randies's book, and are scarcely without bearing on his 'UFO' episode. Self-examination is not Godfrey's strongest point, it seems. We don't get much about the story he told under hypnosis either, except the grim after-effects – and three or four accounts of his throwing up may count as too much information.

Jenny Randies adds an Afterword, in which she sticks to her ins stance that there's such a thing as a plasma vortex the size of a bus, and speculates about parallel universes. 'New witness', bus driver Bob Coates, who was on the same road as Godfrey at about the same time as his sighting, saw nothing more than a small whirring whirling up some leaves, which doesn't really prove a great deal about the 'UFO'.

It's an odd book, then. But definitely worth a look, especially if you're interested in the mutations of police corruption, alias normal practice, in the 1970s and '80s.





# UFOs can damage your health, part two

JENNY RANDLES examines further evidence of dangerous plasma energies connected with UFOs

Last issue I looked at startling revelations made in two new books. One, was the suggestion by astrophysicist Andrew Pike that plasma energy might have played a role in the UFO events in Rendlesham Forest, Suffolk, in 1980, a case that led to severe physiological responses in witnesses and electrical interference, radiation considered above normal and health issues for US servicemen. The other was from police officer Alan Godfrey, who added details of his close encounter in Todmorden, Yorkshire, four weeks before Rendlesham. These revealed long-term physiological responses to his encounter, plasma-like energy beams and a gassing order imposed by the Ministry of Defence. But is there any other evidence that powerful UFO energies might be interacting with close encounter witnesses to the detriment of their health?

Remarkably, just hours after US airmen saw UFOs in Rendlesham, another case occurred near Houston, Texas. On the chilly evening of 29 December 1980 Betty Cash, Vickie Landrum and grandson Colby saw a large mass with blue circling lights that created a wall of heat. They got out of the car to look. On her hurried return to the car, Vickie burnt her hand on the now red-hot door handle, presumably caused by energy from the UFO. Several black unmarked Chinook helicopters then arrived and seemed to shepherd the object away. All three witnesses quickly became ill, with varying symptoms such as headaches, vomiting and incontinence – but the worst affected was Betty, who had stayed outside of the car for the longest time. Her hair even started to fall out. It is possible that the car's metal body acted as a Faraday cage to shield the other occupants from whatever energy was involved. Whilst Vickie and Colby slowly recovered, Betty Cash spent weeks in hospital and remained ill for some time. One doctor thought this was the consequence of the energy emerging from the UFO she had reported. Sceptics argue that her illness was pre-existing and flared up by chance. She died a few years later, but Vickie survived into her 80s. In 1986 the women went to the US court to try and claim damages for their health expenses. The judge rejected their claim on grounds that, whilst other locals reported seeing the helicopters, there was no official record and they could not prove that they, or the UFO, were connected to the US government.

Of course, the other possibility is that the phenomenon involved is some kind of 'unexplained atmospheric plasma' that

occurs in certain circumstances and is understandably perceived as a structured craft with alien connotations. There are other cases suggesting this. One of the most intriguing occurred in pouring rain at 11.30pm on 6 June 1977 at Lartington, County Durham. An agricultural worker riding his motorbike home saw two purple lights to his side and then noticed he was losing power as he ascended a small hill. A car was just starting to overtake him and that too was slowing down. Suddenly, they were both enveloped in a fuzzy UV light that was almost blinding. As the motorcyclist tried to control his bike it was pulled up the incline. At that moment, the rider noticed steam pouring off his leathers from his back and legs, which were getting unbearably hot. Struggling for control of his machine he stopped, as did the car, just as the misty violet glow overhead vanished. The driver and the motorcyclist spoke to one another in shock. The driver said he'd lost all engine power for about 30 seconds when the glow was overhead and yet was 'pulled forward'. The rainwater that soaked the motorbike in the downpour evaporated in seconds and the rider's leathers remained rough where the steam emerged, as seen by local investigators a few days later. The metal side of the motorbike had been far hotter than normal and impossible to touch without risking serious burns. His brakes, perfect up to that night, were found to be so badly worn that they needed completely resetting. On his arrival home the rider's mother remarked on his appearance. Despite it being after midnight on a very wet night he looked sunburnt all over his face, the skin hot to the touch. This faded over the course of the next day, but he experienced nausea and an upset stomach for a few days.

A similar incident occurred on the evening of 13 March 1980 to a contract driver on a job near the village of Hasel, Warrickshire. A cigar-shaped reddish-white mass quickly passed across his front windscreen and the steering wheel he was holding became instantly hot. He had to remove his hands but still got a nasty burn. Luckily, he was able to manoeuvre the car off the road until it cooled enough to steer. The UFO had disappeared. The wheel had a metal coil inside; perhaps the rapid passage of the object, radiating some form of energy, had induced a current in it, producing heat.

In a third case, a man looking for farm work near Oswestry, Shropshire, on the clear morning of 9 February 1988, saw a dog run from a parked car as he was passing. It

crossed the road and ran barking straight into a strange swirling yellowish glowing mist. This straddled a hedgerow and enveloped the barking animal as it ran into it. The shocked female owner emerged from the car and the witness followed her towards the still floating object and tried to calm her screams. As they approached, the hair stood on end and their skin began tingling as an eerie stillness enveloped them. Moments later, the misty glow disappeared as if it were melting away. On the ground where the mist had been lay the dog, looking very ill. Its eyes were red and coat was soaking wet, yet this moisture was evaporating rapidly, with steam visibly pouring upward off the stricken animal. The man carried the heavily breathing pet back to the woman's car and she drove off without saying a word, but he managed to get her licence plate and later traced her. She told him that the dog recovered an hour or so later, but died a few weeks later, although the animal was elderly and so this might have been coincidence.

These cases are remarkably consistent and are by no means the only examples. Together, they strongly support the existence of a dangerous energetic phenomenon that I prefer to call a UAP. Whether they are entirely natural atmospheric forces or are being harnessed in covert research projects, they are clearly harmful and pose a risk to anyone close by. I know of three cases of this type in which a witness later developed cancer. One died young as a consequence and the other two required surgery. That is a high percentage from a sample of about 100.

Are governments aware of such cases, and is that why they pay close attention to UFO reports that may involve a highly energetic UAP? Recently a heavily redacted report was released into the public record. Known as the Condon Study, it was carried out in 2000/2001 by a scientist whose name is removed but who reported to the MoD UFO team. It reveals that secret research into UAP is happening in the US and Russia and discusses why we must keep on top of the problem. One of the most interesting unredacted sections sees the author of the report comment on the Rendlesham Forest incident. "The well reported Rendlesham Forest/Bentwaters event is an example where it might be postulated that several observers were probably exposed to UAP radiation for longer than normal UAP sighting periods." A reasonable concern: but the Rendlesham case is by no means unique. And if we know that, then you can bet the powers that be around the world know it too.

# Goat-headed God: In Search of Baphomet

Baphomet is back! From Detroit Satanists to Australian Neopagans, the Goat of Mendes has found new champions – but where does this icon of Black Magic, supposedly worshipped by heretical Knights Templar, come from? **CHRISTOPHER JOSIFFE** investigates.

In August 2017, a conglomeration of far-right and neo-Nazi groups gathered in Charlottesville, Virginia, ostensibly to protest the removal of a statue of Confederate general Robert E Lee. Infamously, this 'Unite the Right' march left one person dead and 19 injured, demonstrating the very real power of symbol and representation. Two years earlier, in another part of the United States, a more unconventional statue was the focus of controversy and protest, fortunately not resulting in violence.

At a secret location in Detroit, Michigan, in July 2015, The Satanic Temple (a US-based organisation whose HQ is located in Salem, Massachusetts) erected a 9ft (2.7m)-tall bronze statue of a winged, goat-headed, cloven-hoofed figure, with two adorning children beside him (see FT331:4). Although the Satanic Temple has been compared to Anton LaVey's Church of Satan, the Temple is more political in its aims, and without LaVey's belief in the efficacy of magic.

The Detroit statue has the right arm raised, with two fingers of the right hand forming a papal gesture of benediction. The left hand similarly gives a blessing, but with the arm resting outward at waist height. The Satanic Temple declared that their statue specifically represented 'Baphomet', as a distinct form of Satan (for the Temple, Satan represents rebellion, the rejection of all authority, a refusal to accept boundaries or limits, the primacy of personal sovereignty, and humankind's spirit of enquiry).

Elsewhere, in some contemporary Neopagan and Wiccan circles, Baphomet has come to represent untamed nature, a Pan- or Dionysus-like figure, the embodiment of the life force. Trance, body magic, dance and sacred sexuality were all features of Euphoria, an Australian Neopagan festival that began in 2000, taking place in a rural location somewhere outside Melbourne, over a four-day period. Euphoria's presiding deity is Baphomet, and the erotic Baphomet Rite is at the heart of the festival.<sup>1</sup> Here,



*Baphomet is unambiguously 'Other', beyond either/or norms*

Baphomet is unambiguously 'Other', beyond either/or norms. Both male and female, terrifying and arousing, an enemy and a friend. S/he is also, by virtue of her/his hermaphroditic attributes, a 'genderqueer' figure opposing and challenging heteronormative sexual orthodoxy. This Baphomet appears to be derived at least in part from the goat-like Devil of the legendary medieval Witches' Sabbat.

But what, originally, did the name Baphomet denote? And whence does the goat-headed figure originate?

LEFT: The iconic Baphomet engraving from Éliphas Lévi's *Transcendental Magic*.  
FACING PAGE: The Satanic Temple's Baphomet statue, which was unveiled in Detroit in 2015

## LEVI'S ORIGINALS

The imagery of the Detroit sculpture is closely based upon an engraving that appears in *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie* (1854-56, translated by AE Waite as *Transcendental Magic: Its Doctrine and Ritual*) by the seminal French esoteric writer Éliphas Lévi (real name Alphonse Louis Constant). Here it is captioned: "The Sabbatic Goat: The Baphomet of Mendes." Mendes was the Greek name for the ancient Egyptian city of Djedet, whose inhabitants, according to Herodotus, "consider all goats sacred, the male even more than the female... one he-goat is most sacred of all; when he dies, it is ordained that there should be great mourning in all the Mendesian district. In the Egyptian language Mendes is the name both for the he-goat and for Pan."<sup>2</sup>

One of the city's patron deities was the ram god Banebdjedet, sometimes represented as a goat. Djedet was also associated with the worship of Pan: "The Egyptians of whom I have spoken sacrifice no goats, male or female: the Mendesians reckon Pan among the eight gods who, they say, were before the 12 gods."<sup>3</sup>

Lévi's depiction of Baphomet differs from that of the Satanic Temple in that his is hermaphroditic, with a pair of female breasts. It also has the alchemical SOLVE (separate, dissolve) and COAGULA (unite, join together) upon the right and left forearms respectively, and features two crescent Moons, one light and one dark, behind each hand. Both Baphometes feature a pentagram between their horns, a torch atop their heads, and both have a caduceus arising from their groin areas. Interpretations of Lévi's design tend to emphasise its unification of opposites, male-





**ABOVE LEFT** Carvings on the Templar Commandery building in Saint-Bris-le-Vineux include a Baphomet-like head. **ABOVE RIGHT** Another carving, on the church of Saint-Merri in Paris, bears an even closer resemblance to Lévi's Baphomet. **BELOW** Goya's 1798 painting *El Aquelarre* might have been another influence on Lévi

female, good-evil, day-night, a representation of totality, the Universal. Lévi himself described it as a "pantheistic and magical figure of the Absolute". The goat's head represents matter and the physical body, whilst the figure's wings signify its heavenly aspiration or nature. The four elements are present: two hooves are placed on a globe (earth); fish scales adorn the belly (water); its wings denote air, and a fiery torch blazes between its two horns.

Elsewhere in *Transcendental Magic*, Lévi reiterates his belief that the figure of Baphomet is emblematic of occult philosophy as a whole, that which lay concealed in the myths of pre-Classical Greece, in Kabbalah, the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the Great Work of the alchemists, for "they are expressions of the different applications of one same secret".<sup>4</sup> Of the Great Work specifically, he says: "The Gnostics represented it as the fiery body of the Holy Spirit; it was the object of adoration in the secret rites of the Sabbath; and the Temple, under the hieroglyphic figure of Baphomet or the Androgyne of Mendes."<sup>5</sup>

It has sometimes been suggested that Lévi's inspiration for his engraving was a carved head on the facade of the Templar Commandery building in Saint-Bris-le-Vineux, roughly 150 km (93 miles) south-east of Paris.<sup>6</sup> However, in the present author's opinion, Lévi, a Parisian, is more likely to have been inspired by another carving that appears on the exterior of the 16th-century Gothic church of Saint-Merri, near the Pompidou Centre in Paris. It resembles Lévi's Baphomet in several respects: a winged,

horned, demonic figure with female breasts, squatting on a pedestal or plinth.

Goya's haunting, dream-like painting *El Aquelarre* (The Witches' Sabbath, 1798), where an enormous goat presides over the coven, may well have been another influence. Like Lévi's Baphomet, the goat sits upright, elevated upon a mound, arms aloft. A crescent moon appears in the background. Another possible source or inspiration is the goat-headed, winged Devil who appears in several illustrations in Francesco Maria Guazzo's 1608 *Compendium Maleficarum*, with humans making obeisance in each one.



## UNHEARD-OF THINGS

The Knights Templar (whose full title was the Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon; see **FT193:38-41**) are, of course, inextricably linked with Baphomet. Lévi appears to have conflated Banebdjedot, the goat or ram deity of Mendes, with Baphomet, the alleged object of worship of the Templars. In early 14th-century records of Templar interrogations and trials, the name 'Baphomet' sometimes appears; 'Mahomet' is also recorded. It is believed by many that the name 'Baphomet' was originally derived from 'Mahomet' (i.e.

the prophet Mohammed), with the suggestion that during the Crusades, the Templars had come into too close contact with the Saracen foe, and had adopted some of their religious practices.

Documentation of interrogations and trial testimony certainly make mention of Templar worship of an idol, sometimes described as a head. But there was no consensus regarding its physical appearance; the descriptions (many derived through torture) of the idol are varied, and do not resemble Lévi's goat-headed figure. The papal *Articles of Accusation* issued in August 1308, detailing the charges against the Knights Templar, stated:

Item, that in each province they had idols, namely heads, of which some had three faces, and some one, and others had a human skull

Item, that they adored these idols or that idol, and especially in their great chapters and assemblies.

Item, that they venerated [them]  
Item, that [they venerated them] as God

*Item, that [they venerated them] as their Saviour.*

*Item, that they said that that head could save them.*

*Item, that [it could] make riches.*

*Item, that it gave them all the riches of the Order*

*Item, that it made the trees flower.*

*Item, that [it made] the land germinate.<sup>7</sup>*

Elsewhere, one reads of the Templars' idol as a gilded or brazen head or other reliquary; a painting on a wall or beam of wood, having two faces; having four faces; a long-bearded man's head; "a face of flesh... with the hairs of a dog... very bluish in colour and stained".<sup>8</sup> Frequently, too, a cat (long associated, of course, with witchcraft and the Devil) is mentioned as an object of worship. Nowhere, however, is the idol described as resembling a goat, although one Templar described it as a head with "two small horns and possessing the ability to reply to questions put to it."<sup>9</sup>

It should be noted that despite our focus upon these allegations of idol-worship, the majority of Templar confessions were concerned with the denial and refutation of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Son of God. Thus, of 231 Templars examined during the Paris inquisitions, the majority admitted to having denied Christ and to having defiled the Cross, but only a very few confessed to the idolatrous worship of a head. Renunciation of Christ was the primary accusation, from which the others sprang.

Whether or not the Templars were genuine heretics, with religious and mystical views far removed from mainstream Christianity, is still a matter for debate. One persuasive school of thought has it that the suspects, many of whom were subjected to torture, were merely regurgitating the fantasies of the inquisitors. Norman Cohn, in his *Europe's Inner Demons* (Sussex University Press, 1975) notes that similar accusations that had been levelled at Jews, witches and similar 'othered' groups were also aimed at the Templars.<sup>10</sup> Thus, they were accused of consorting with beautiful female demons, homosexuality, spitting on crucifixes, the worship of idols (these idols sometimes anointed with the fat of burnt children), and using the ashes of burnt Templar bodies to make a potent magical powder.

Any attempt to disentangle this convoluted history must first establish whether the name 'Baphomet' really was used by mediaeval Christian writers in place of 'Mahomet' (Mohammed). And there are indeed several examples of this. Thus, a song composed by the troubadour Austoric d'Arlhac, lamenting the defeat of the Seventh Crusade in 1250, contains the lines:

*Christianity has been given a very great blow;*

*Such a great loss I believe us not to have suffered [before];*

*For this reason that we may as well abandon our belief in God,*

*And [instead] worship Bafomet [Mohammed] right there...<sup>11</sup>*

Another Troubadour song (attributed to one Ricaut Bonome), believed to have been a Templar, takes as its theme the series of defeats that befell the Crusader kingdom in 1265. It contains the following lines:

*And we are defeated every day  
Because God sleeps, who once stood watch,  
And Bafometz [Mohammed] acts with all his power...<sup>12</sup>*

An Old French epic poem, the *Chanson de Geste de Sunon de Pouille*, written circa 1235, takes as its theme a Frankish crusade against the Saracens at the time of Charlemagne. Here, the name 'Bafumetz' appears to be one of several pagan gods believed by mediaeval Christians to be worshipped by Muslims, the others being Termagant, Jupiter and Apollyon.<sup>13</sup>

Note that all the above references to Baphomet preceded by several decades those which appear in the Templars' interrogations and trials, demonstrating that

the name was in existence well before.

It is something of an irony that, due to a profound ignorance of Islam by much of Western Christendom, many in mediaeval Europe viewed Muslims as idolaters who worshipped Mohammed. Ironic, considering Islam's abhorrence of 'graven images', a function of its uncompromising monotheism. So strong was this mistaken association that the words 'Mahomet' and 'Baphomet' became synonymous with idols; 'mahomet' morphed into 'mammet' or 'mommet', meaning a false god, a lifeless puppet or effigy; alternatively, a witch's poppet or doll, used to work sympathetic magic.

It is important to emphasise that, prior to the Templar inquisitions and trials, there had been no evidence to suggest that the Knights were associated with an idol in the form of a head (whether named Baphomet or not), just rumour. Moreover, despite thorough examinations and searches, no such head was ever found in any Templar buildings throughout Europe. It's been proposed that the cult of relics (which was not without its critics at the time) may have led to these charges of idolatry; Holy relics were popular throughout the Christian world; they might be the actual skull of a saint, or a jewelled, gilded replica. As for the Templars, it has been argued that their reverence for the skulls of two martyrs (Saints Euphemia and Ursula) had been deliberately misunderstood.

Another rumour, the suspicion that the Knights Templar had, during their long sojourn in the Middle East, 'gone native' and adopted Saracen customs and religion, was explicitly given voice in interrogation testimony, which had the newly initiated Knight spitting and trampling upon a

## There was a suspicion that the Knights Templar had gone native in the Middle East



ABOVE: Another possible source for Levi's Baphomet is the goat-headed, winged Devil seen in numerous illustrations in Guazzo's *Compendium Maleficarum* of 1608.



crucifix, then being led to the Baphomet idol accompanied by cries of "Yalla" – very similar to the Arabic "Ya Allah". Again, it is quite probable that the sleep-and food-deprived, disorientated and in some cases tortured prisoners were merely echoing the interrogators' own beliefs and fantasies.

It has also been suggested that the blasphemous elements of the initiation did actually take place, but were a form of training whereby the novice warrior monk was shown what he might expect were he to be captured by the Saracens (much as the training of an SAS man prior to being posted to Northern Ireland during the "Troubles" would simulate capture

and interrogation by the IRA). It was permissible for him to renounce Christ by such outward demonstration, provided that he remained faithful in his heart, recanting and repenting at the earliest opportunity.

Leaving aside the question of whether the Knights had ever denied Christ as the true God, it seems most likely that their worship of Baphomet, the idolatrous head, was an invention of their inquisitors, perhaps based in part upon a growing antipathy towards the cult of relics, and in part inspired by mediaeval traditions of oracular heads, Roger Bacon (c1220-1292) and his fabled brazen head being the most obvious example.

## PICK A CARD

Lévi's Baphomet was evidently the model for artist Pamela Colman Smith's design for the 15th Tarot Trump, the Devil, in the celebrated Rider-Waite Tarot deck, first published in 1910. However, another celebrated deck (or rather, a series of decks), the Tarot de Marseilles, was in existence around 200 years before that; here, *Le Diable* bears a marked similarity to Lévi's 1850s engraving, with its horns, wings and female breasts. Again, one arm gestures heavenwards, whilst the other points towards Earth, or to Hell. In his *Transcendental Magic*, Lévi mentions the "Italian Tarot" (then a synonym for the Tarot de Marseilles) several times. However, compare these with the Devil of the far older Visconti-Sforza Tarot, dating from the mid-15th century, the artist Bonifacio Bembo having been commissioned by the Visconti and Sforza ducal families of Milan.

From this, it appears probable that early Tarot designs had influenced Lévi, just as his own Sabbatic Goat was to be the inspiration for so many subsequent depictions that helped to disseminate the image among a wider public. The Rider-Waite Tarot is thought to be the best-selling and arguably best-known Tarot deck in the world. And, circulating the image still further, the notorious but successful late-19th century anti-Masonic hoaxes of French journalist and author Leo Taxil (real name Gabriel Jogand-Pagès) utilised Lévi's Baphomet in their efforts to smear Freemasonry as a Satanic conspiracy.

## PLEASE HAMMER DON'T HURT 'EM

Taxil's accusations were not new. Around 80 years before his spurious claims were published, and around 50 years before Lévi's seminal Baphomet illustration first saw the light of day, another text was published, one that is significant in the construction of the Baphomet myth. This was Baron Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall's *Mysterium Baphometis Revelatum* (a section from his larger *Fundgruben des Orients* (*Treasures of the East*, 1818), in which the Austrian historian adopted a distinctly hostile position towards the Knights Templar. Von Hammer regarded the Templars as one of a long line of heretics, beginning with Gnostic sects, specifically the Ophites, through the Albigensians, by way of Hassan i Sabbah's Assassins, leading ultimately to Enlightenment Freemasonry. A fervent reactionary, he sought to portray the radicals of the French Revolution as heirs to certain blasphemous and evil ideologies of the past. He was, in effect, an early conspiracy theorist, with a *Foucault's Pendulum*-style 'grand unified' theory – numerous secret societies throughout the centuries as incarnations of a single body dedicated to the achievement of their ultimate goals of power and domination.

In support of his argument that Baphomet had not been a mere invention of the Templars' inquisitors, von Hammer offered



ABOVE: Freemasons dressed as Knights Templar worship Baphomet in an engraving from *Les Mystères de la Franc-maçonnerie* by Leo Taxil.

as evidence various carved and engraved artefacts from the late Classical to mediaeval periods. These supposedly depicted Baphomet amidst heretical, orgiastic and sacrificial rites, and were, he claimed, illustrative of surviving Gnostic beliefs which were enthusiastically continued by the Knights Templar. Line drawings of many of these objects appear in *Mysterium Baphometis Revelatum*. It should be noted that, today, the general consensus among contemporary historians holds these artefacts to have been forgeries.<sup>14</sup>

Some years prior to writing his *Mysterium Baphometis Revelatum*, von Hammer had also translated *Ancient Alphabets and Hieroglyphic Characters Explained*, a mysterious text by the 9th- or 10th-century Arabic historian and alchemist Ibn Wahshiyya the Nabatean, who is believed to have (at least partially) deciphered the ancient Egyptian hieroglyph writing system, some 800 years before the French philologist Champollion. In *Ancient Alphabets*, after several pages of hieroglyphs and their meanings (said by Ibn Wahshiyya to represent the 'Hermesian language') is a curious beetle-bodied, winged figure named as 'Bahumed'. "This figure," writes Ibn Wahshiyya, "is expressive of the most sublime secret, called originally Bahumed and Kharul (or call) viz. *The Secret of the nature of the world, or The Secret of Secrets, or The Beginning and Return of every thing.*"<sup>15</sup>

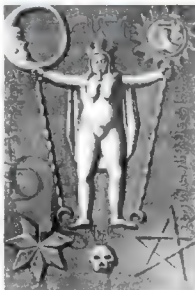
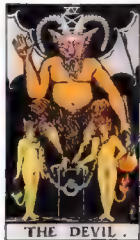
Von Hammer offered his own etymology for the name Baphomet, suggesting that it was derived from the Greek βαφο (bafō) and μετρο (metr), that is, "the Gnostic baptism, which was not performed by the water of redemption, but was a spiritual lustration by fire: BAFOMET therefore signifies illumination of the spirit."<sup>16</sup>

150 years later, Idries Shah proposed an alternative derivation. Writing as 'Arkon Daraul' in his *Secret Societies* (Frederick Muller, 1961), he suggests 'Baphomet' to be a corruption of the Arabic *abu fahimat* (father of understanding). Elsewhere, Lévi had argued that the name was composed of three abbreviations, TEM OHP AB, that is, *Templum hominum pacis abbas* ('the father of the temple of universal peace among men'). Why it should have been in reverse order Lévi did not explain, perhaps it was an echo of the backward liturgy of the Satanic Black Mass.<sup>17</sup>

Whether von Hammer's thesis has any validity or not (and most modern historians give him short shrift), it is probable that *Mysterium Baphometis Revelatum*, particularly the imagery of the line drawings, was a major influence upon Lévi's conception of Baphomet.

#### NEW ROMANTICIS

Nineteenth-century Romantic authors helped keep the legend of the Knights Templar alive; but



ABOVE: Various Tarot decks either prefigure or echo Lévi's Baphomet. (left to right) The Rider Waite Tarot, the Tarot de Marseilles and the Visconti-Sforza Tarot. LEFT: One of von Hammer's probably forged ancient representations of Baphomet. BELOW: The beetle-bodied, winged figure of 'Bahumed' in *Ancient Alphabets*

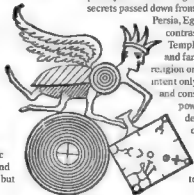
more than that, the Romantics are in large part responsible for the mystique in which the Templars are now cloaked. Much popular belief now views them as repositories of ancient wisdom, of powerful magical knowledge, rather than simple Crusading warriors or bankers. A negative version of this sees them as an Illuminati-style secret society bent on world domination. Balzac portrayed them as the guardians of esoteric secrets passed down from Chaldaea, India,

Persia, Egypt and Morocco. In contrast, Walter Raleigh's Templars are ruthless and fanatical, without religion or moral values, intent only on accumulating and consolidating their power. The poet Gérard de Nerval saw the crusading Templars as a secret and mystical society that had sought to synthesise

Catholicism with the ideas of Middle Eastern sects like the Druze, Gnostics and Essenes. The Druze, he wrote in his *Voyages en Orient*, "have been compared to the Pythagoreans, the Essenes, the Gnostics, and it appears that the Templars, the Rouge-Croix and the modern Freemasons borrowed many of their ideas."<sup>18</sup> He also claimed that the Druze employ a black stone as a means of recognising one another, and that "this Stone must be the bohomet (little idol) which is referred to in the trial of the Templars."<sup>19</sup> Presumably this black stone is a literary echo of the sacred Kaaba of Mecca, but, in the sense of a mysterious stone with its own reconsecrated name, it is also peculiarly reminiscent of Kenneth Grant's Cult of the Black Stone, Ixaxaar (by way of Arthur Machen's *Novel of the Black Seal*).<sup>20</sup>

#### IT'S THAT MAN AGAIN

Mention of Kenneth Grant inevitably leads us on to Aleister Crowley; indeed, a discussion of Baphomet would be incomplete without mention of the Beast. At the start of the 20th century, a group of high-ranking German and Austrian Freemasons established the Order of Oriental Templars, or *Ordo Templi Orientis* (OTO). It differed from other Masonic orders in that it placed sexual magic, teachings apparently derived from Indian *pogras*, at its core. The trials of the 14th century having linked the Knights Templar with unusual sexual practices in the popular imagination meant that the name of the order was apposite. Just over 10 years later, in 1912, Theodor Reuss, then head of the OTO, appointed Crowley to be the Order's head in Great Britain, his full title being *Supreme and Holy King of Ireland, Iona*





LEFT: Anton LaVey, founder of the Church of Satan taps his three-year-old daughter, Zeena Gaiatea LaVey, on the head with a sword during a Satanic baptism conducted under the 'Sigil of Baphomet' BELOW: The Sigil also appeared on the Church's 1968 Satanic Mass LP, and these days adorns T-shirts, hoodies and even seasonal knitwear



Masonry as well as of Christ ("the stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner" - Mark 12 10).

Whilst Levi denied that his Baphomet was to be equated with the Devil, proposing that the figure be regarded as a symbol of initiation, such a link had been made elsewhere. The 18th-century German theologian and Freemason Johann August Starck appears to have been the first to have made this suggestion, in his 1766 *Canon of the Temple*. This identification of Baphomet with Satan has proved to be a persistent one.

The so-called Sigil of Baphomet (a goat's head within a pentagram), a variant image on the Baphomet theme, has become popular in recent years owing to its adoption by various heavy metal groups (see, for example, Geordie proto-black-metal band Venom's 1981 debut album *Welcome to Hell*). In fact, the design had appeared on an earlier album - the Church of Satan's *Satanic Mass* LP from 1968. As well as a recording of a Satanic Mass itself, the LP included some spoken-word material

that was subsequently published in the *Satanic Bible*, whose cover also featured the Sigil. The Church of Satan's founder Anton LaVey is credited with having created the Sigil, however, it does have a 19th-century antecedent.

Stanlas de Guanta, the fin-de-siècle French poet, mystic, cabalist and Rosicrucian published his *La Clef de la Magie Noire* in 1897;<sup>23</sup> an illustration on page 387 shows two pentagrams, one of which is inverted. This latter has a goat's

and all the Britains within the Sanctuary of the Gnosis. Crowley took the magical name of Baphomet. By so doing, he was associating himself not only with the esoteric and proto-Masonic wisdom of the Templars, but also, perhaps, with Satanism, by way of the blasphemous, sexualised image of Lévi's Mendes goat. "This serpent, SATAN," Crowley wrote, "is not the enemy of Man, but HE who made Gods of our race, knowing Good and Evil; He bade 'Know Thyself' and taught Initiation. He is 'the Devil' of the Book of Thoth [i.e. the Tarot], and his emblem is BAPHOMET, the Androgyne who is the hieroglyph of arcane perfection."<sup>21</sup> This is Satan or Lucifer as Light bringer, teacher of humankind, encouraging us child-like, timid humans to become free-thinking and independent. This benevolent Devil was portrayed by the sculptor of The Satanic Temple's Detroit Baphomet, who keeps a kindly watch over his two wards, the adoring boy and girl, whereas the Devil in the Rider-Waite Tarot shows the man and woman in chains, enslaved to him by their physical desires

During the 1918 Amalantrah Working, Roddie Minor, one of Crowley's Scarlet Women, acted as a medium and communicated (whilst in an opium trance)

with an entity known as the Wizard Amalantrah. Crowley enquired of the Wizard the correct way to spell Baphomet (using Hebrew letters). He was informed that there was an additional 'R' at the end - BAFVMIthR - which name he associated with Mithras. And, by gematria, this spelling yielded the number 729 (9 x 9 x 9). Crowley wrote: "This number had never appeared in my Cabalistic working and therefore meant nothing to me. It however justified itself as the cube of nine. The word *Kepós*; [kephas], the mystic title given by Christ to Peter as the cornerstone of the Church, has this same value. So far, the Wizard had shown great qualities! He had... shown why the Templars should have given the name Baphomet to their so-called idol. Baphomet was Father Mithras, the cubical stone which was the corner of the Temple."<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps the cube upon which Baphomet sits in the famous engraving by Lévi (who, incidentally, was claimed by Crowley as a previous incarnation) may be interpreted as the Temple's cornerstone, a symbol of



head within the pentagram, surrounded by five Hebrew letters at each of its points. These spell *LYVTN* or *Leviathan*, the monstrous sea beast from the Old Testament and the Apocrypha; and as de Guaita's design also bears the names of Samael and Lilith.<sup>24</sup> It's clear why this pentagram is reversed, pointing downwards towards Earth or to Hell (in contrast to the upward-pointing pentagram with the names of Adam, Eve and a Cabalistic spelling of Christ in Hebrew letters) and why LaVey co-opted it.

This 'Leviathan' Sigil is believed to have been designed for de Guaita by Oswald Wirth, who later produced his own Tarot deck.<sup>25</sup> More recently, the image was reproduced in Maurice Bessy's 1962 *Histoire en 1000 Images de la Magie*.<sup>26</sup> Bessy's book was LaVey's source for the image, but whilst the Church of Satan's image kept the Hebrew letters, it dropped the names of Lilith and Samael. Perhaps the Hebrew appeared more esoteric, but more importantly, LaVey wished to retain the name Leviathan, who (according to the 15th-century *Book of Abramelin*) is one of the four Crown Princes of Hell, he represents the element of water and the West quarter.

As the official symbol of the Church of Satan and of LaVeyan Satanism, the Sigil of Baphomet is available in numerous forms worldwide (check eBay for embroidered Baphomet patches, T-shirts, hoodies and the like). This, of course, has helped to spread awareness and recognition of the name Baphomet.

## HOW TO GET AHEAD

Baphomet is arguably now more popular than ever before. In 2003, novelist Dan Brown brought the name to the attention of millions who would previously have been unaware of the goat-headed one. In *The Da Vinci Code*, Brown proposes that 'Baphomet' is simply an encoded form of the Greek word *sophia* (wisdom), using, somewhat tortuously, the Atbash substitution cipher.<sup>27</sup> Prior to Brown was Baigent, Leigh and Lincoln's best-selling *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* (1982). Here, the Templars are on a top-secret archaeological dig beneath Jerusalem's Temple Mount at the end of the 11th century, where they apparently find proof of Jesus's marriage to Mary Magdalene, their children, and the continuing bloodline. Keith Laidler went one better in his *The Head of God: The Lost Treasure of the Templars* (1998), in which the Templars dug up the embalmed head of Jesus; this clearly references the Templar interrogations and trials and the allegations of idolatry centred on a head they called Baphomet.

The figure of Baphomet is, whether named as such or not, an enduring one; an image and a character that speaks to our unconscious desires, the allure of transgression and of blurred demarcation lines. Baphomet-themed T-shirts, hoodies, statuettes, mobile phone cases and more are offered on eBay and Amazon, even a traditional Baphomet Christmas knitted jumper is available.

Has the commodified rebellion and consumer transgression of late capitalism

kept Baphomet in the public eye, and in the baskets of online shopping websites? Some of the aforementioned Baphomet products bear no resemblance to Lévi's design, instead featuring upside-down pentagrams, the number '666' and so on: generic shopping-mall Satanist trinkets. Clearly the name is a familiar one, and thus successful as a marketing tool. No doubt, Crowley's identification with Baphomet helped keep the name, if nothing else, in the spotlight. Might one argue that Crowley's bisexuality was a precursor to the sexual liberation of the last 50 years? Or that his placing sex and sexuality at the heart of human experience prefigured its centrality in today's popular culture? Baphomet, as a variant of Satan, may be said to represent unashamed sexuality and the pleasures of bodily experience. Perhaps that is one reason for her/his continued popularity today.

Unlike Detroit, the United Kingdom does not yet boast its own Baphomet statue. Surely that time has come, and, just as London's ICA recently displayed a giant Pazuzu on its roof, I look forward to seeing a winged, horned, goat-headed hermaphrodite standing tall and proud upon Trafalgar Square's Fourth Plinth.

✦ CHRISTOPHER JOSIFFE is a regular contributor to *FT* and the author of *Geff The Strange Tale of an Extra-Special Talking Mongoose*, which is now available from Strange Attractor Press. <https://strangeattractorreedbag.com/buy/geff/>

## NOTES

1 See Douglas Ezy, *See, Death and Witchcraft: A Contemporary Pagan Festival* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

2 Herodotus *Histories*, Book II Chapter 46, Sections 3-4, translation by AD Godley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920).

3 *Ibid.*, Book II Chapter 46, Section 1.

4 Eliphas Lévi, trans AE Waite, *Transcendental Magic: Its Occult and Ritual* (London: George Redway, 1856), p13.

5 *Ibid.*, p14.

6 See, for example, Michael Howard, *The Occult Conspiracy* (London: Rider, 1989), p38.

7 Articles of Accusation, in *Faciens Misericordiam* (Papal Bull issued by Pope Clement V, 12 Aug 1308; see Malcolm Barber, *The Trial of the Templars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978) p249).

8 *Ibid.*, p100.

9 *Ibid.*, p163.

10 The King of France Philip IV ('Philip the Fair'), began his persecution of the Templars in 1307. The previous year, he had expelled France's Jews and seized their property. Earlier still, he had

subjected Lombard merchants in Paris to the same treatment. It seems indisputable that Philip's various wars (against England, against Flanders, his father's war against Aragon) had left the royal coffers empty, hence his strategy of ruthlessly purloining the assets of minority groups once all legitimate sources of revenue had been exhausted.

11 Jaye Puckett, 'Recommenotez novels: estroire: The Troubadours and the Rhetoric of the Later Crusades', *MLN*, vol 118, no4, French Issue (Sep 2003), p878, note 59.

12 Giulio Bertoni, 'Il servente di Ricaut Bonomei (1265)', *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie*, vol 34 (1910), pp701-707.

13 Unes 1522-1523, edited by Jeanne Baroin (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1968). Baron believed that 'Balametiz Yaporins' could be understood as 'Baphomet the Cursed', p 14.

14 See, for example, Peter Partner's *The Murdered Magicians: the Templars and their Myth* (Oxford University Press, 1981).

15 In Wahshyia, *Ancient Alphabets and Hieroglyphic Characters Explained: with an Account of the Egyptian Priests, their Classes,*

*Initiation, and Sacrifice, in the Arabic Language*, by Ahmad bin Abukher bin Wahshih, and in English by Joseph Hammer, Secretary to the Imperial Legation, Constantinople (London: 1806) pp22-23.

16 *Literary Gazette: A Weekly Journal of Literature, Science, and the Fine Arts*, 15 May 1819, Vol 3, no 121, p311.

17 Lévi, op.cit. p296.

18 Gérard de Nerval, *The Women of Cairo: Scenes of Life in the Orient*, Vol 2 (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1930), p53.

19 *Ibid.*, p150.

20 See Kenneth Grant, *Outer Gateways* (London: Skoob, 1994) p125.

21 Aleister Crowley, *Magick* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), footnote p296.

22 Aleister Crowley, *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley on an Autobiography*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p633.

23 Paris. Chamuel, 1897. It was the third volume in de Guaita's *Essais de Sciences Moudites* collected work 1, *Au Seuil du Mystère*; II, *Le Serpent de la Genèse*, première septaine (Livre I), *Le Temple de Satan*; II, *Le*

*Serpent de la Genèse*, seconde septaine (Livre II), *Le Ciel de la Magie Noire*, and the uncompleted fourth volume, *Le Problème du Mal*.

24 In the Jewish tradition, Samael is an archangel sometimes identified as the Angel of Death; he is regarded as a demon in some gnostic and demonological texts of the Christian period. By contrast, Lilith was always seen as a demon, in Sumerian and Babylonian mythology as well as later Jewish lore. Some Kabbalistic texts portray her as Samael's lover, others, as Adam's first wife.

25 In Paul Jargot's *Science Occulte et Magie Pratique* (Paris: Editions Orluvin, 1924) p172 and by Wirth himself in his 1931 work on esoteric Freemasonry, *La Franc-Maçonnerie Rendue Intelligible à ces Adeptes* (*Deuxième Partie. Le Compagnon*), (Paris: Dery-Lesons, 1931) p 60.

26 Paris. Editions du Pont Royal, 1962, first English edition. A *Pictorial History of Magic and the Supernatural*, London: Spring Books, 1964.

27 An idea derived from Hugh Schonfield's *The Essene Odyssey: The Mystery of the True Teacher and the Essene Impact on the Shaping of Human Destiny* (1984).

# The Holy Blood: Eucharistic Miracles

Holy Communion commemorates Christ's sacrifice in symbolic form, but over the centuries there have been celebrated instances in which the Host has apparently oozed blood or even transformed into human tissue. **TED HARRISON** steps up to the altar rail and surveys some noted Eucharistic miracles and their possible mundane explanations.



**LEFT:** A Corpus Christi procession in which the 'Corporal of Bolsena', stained by a bleeding host, is displayed. **BELOW:** Pope Urban IV, who approved the miracle in 1264.

described in a catalogue entitled 'The Eucharistic Miracles of the World'.

Many of the claims are centuries-old legends. One celebrated example is from eighth century Lanoano in Italy, where a priest who was having doubts about the doctrine of transubstantiation was celebrating Mass. As he pronounced the words of consecration the Host changed, so the story goes, into flesh and the wine into blood. He called the congregation to the altar to verify the miracle. The flesh and the blood, which coagulated into five globules, were placed in a reliquary.

Through the monastery's long history, the relics have been carefully preserved and today are guarded by Franciscans. Over 1,200 years later, the flesh appears not to have decomposed and is still preserved at the Church of San Francesco.

Another famous Italian Eucharistic miracle occurred in Bolsena, just north of Rome. In 1263, a visiting priest was celebrating Mass when a consecrated Host was seen to bleed and some of the blood stained the corporal, the square white linen cloth, resembling a handkerchief, used by the celebrant. Pope Urban IV happened to be 15 miles away in Orvieto and was immediately informed. He ordered a "thorough fact-finding investigation and that the miraculous Host and the linen cloth stained with blood be brought to Orvieto and placed on display". There was a popular movement of renewed interest in the stories of the suffering of Christ at the time. It was after approving the miracle at Bolsena that Urban IV, in 1264, declared the Feast of Corpus Christi by papal bull, which is still celebrated every year in late Spring.

Today 'The Corporal of Bolsena' is still kept in the Cathedral at Orvieto. It may be seen behind glass in a lavishly ornate reliquary, and believers say that when they

## *The host changed into flesh and the wine into blood*



**I**n October 2006, while helping a priest distribute Communion at a church in Tixtla, Mexico, a religious sister noticed something strange on the pix, the small plate on which she was carrying the consecrated bread. She turned to the priest, so reports claim, with tears in her eyes. The Communion Host she was about to give to a parishioner was oozing blood.

Roman Catholics believe that during Mass a miracle is performed, on cue, thousands of times a week. At the moment of consecration, the bread (the Host) and wine become the body and blood of Jesus; not in a physical and chemical sense, but in essence and meaning. This 'miracle' is called transubstantiation.

However, for centuries some faithful Catholics have believed that in rare cases the consecrated Communion elements can literally turn into human tissue. This was what the Tixtla nun believed she was witnessing with her own eyes.

### **MEDIAEVAL MIRACLES**

The Vatican has declared over 150 claims of Eucharistic miracles to be 'church approved'. They have been listed and





ABOVE: The 'Corporal of Bolsena' in its reliquary at Orvieto Cathedral. BELOW: The Lanciano Host, preserved in a reliquary in the Church of San Francesco.

gaze at the reddish marks on the cloth they see the shape of the head of Christ.

While Italy has more claims (30) than any other country, 20 other nations make it into the Eucharistic miracle charts. Portugal's best-known case happened in 13th century Santarém. A woman was distressed that her husband was being unfaithful to her, and she decided to consult a sorceress for help. "The sorceress told her the price of her services was a consecrated Host. She went to Mass at the Church of St Stephen and received the Eucharist on her tongue. She then removed the Eucharist from her mouth, wrapped it in her veil, and headed to the door of the church. But before she got out, the Host began to bleed.

"When she got home, she put the bloodied Host in a trunk. That night, a miraculous light emanated from the trunk. She repented of what she had done and the next morning confessed to her priest."

The miracle was duly investigated and the church was renamed The Church of the Holy Miracle.

#### WORLDWIDE WONDERS

While the main European Catholic countries unsurprisingly predominate when it comes to Eucharistic miracles, cases have been reported from as far afield as India and Egypt.

The Egyptian case is probably the



earliest on record and involved a monk living in a religious community in the desert who doubted the teaching of the Church and asked for proof that the bread of the Eucharist was, in reality, the Body of Christ. His evidence, so the fifth century story goes, came during Mass one Sunday when, in place of the Host, the monk saw the infant Jesus, who was pierced with a sword by an angel when the Host was lifted up, his blood running into the chalice. Just as the monk was given Communion, the Host became bread again and the doubting monk cried out that he now truly believed.

The Indian claim is one of many from recent years, confirming that the phenomenon is not just a medieval peculiarity. On 28 April 2001, in the parish church of St Mary of Chirattakonam in Tiruvandrum, South India, Father Johnson Karnoor placed a consecrated Host in a monstrance for public adoration. This common Catholic practice involves placing a large Communion wafer in a glass-fronted and highly ornate vessel, a monstrance, used solely for the purpose. "I saw what appeared to be three dots in the Holy Eucharist. I then stopped praying and began to look at the monstrance, also inviting the faithful to admire the three dots."

A week later, Father Karnoor looked at the Host again and immediately noticed the likeness of a human face. "I was deeply



**ABOVE:** The Host bearing the "the figure of a man" in a monstrance spotted by Father Karmoor church of St Mary of Chittakkonam in Trivandrum, South India (above).  
**BELOW:** At the Church of Christ the King in Vilkannur, Kerala, this image of a bearded man was interpreted as the face of Christ and drew thousands of pilgrims.

moved and asked the faithful to kneel and begin praying. I noticed that the rest of the faithful were looking intently at the monstrance... as the minutes went by, the image became more and more clear. I began to cry... I asked the altar server what he noticed in the monstrance. He answered 'I see the figure of a man.' I noticed that the rest of the faithful were looking intently at the monstrance."

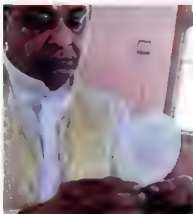
Later he called a photographer to take pictures of the Holy Eucharist with the human face on it. Today, the Host is still kept at the church.

Another example of this variant – in which the face of Christ appears without any blood being seen – was reported in November 2013 at the church of Christ the King in Vilkannur, Kerala, India. Here, the priest saw a face of a bearded man appear on the large Communion Host traditionally raised during the Mass at the moment of consecration. When the Host was put on public view the church became a centre of pilgrimage, with thousands of the curious and the faithful arriving to see the "maraculous" image of the face of Christ.

The presence of blood, however, is the most commonly reported characteristic of a Eucharistic miracle. In April 2017 in Santa Fe, Argentina, a group of young Roman Catholics at a drug rehabilitation centre were praying and singing in front of a consecrated Host that was on display. As they looked at the Host in adoration, it apparently started to bleed. It was the Tuesday of Holy Week, when the trial and suffering of Jesus is especially recalled. Juan Tenango, from the San Miguel centre at Guemes, described the oozing liquid as being a "deep red colour".

The local bishop instructed that the Host be removed from public display for

## He saw the face of a bearded man appear on the communion host



appropriate examination and a statement was issued by the Diocese of Rafaela. It did not deny that there had been instances in history when, indeed, the bread literally turned into the body of Christ, but added cautiously, "these cases have been neither common nor simple to discern... Meanwhile, prudence and respect are recommended".

In 2016 a bleeding Host in Poland was officially approved for veneration by Bishop Zbigniew Kiernikowski of Legnica. On Christmas Day in 2013, a consecrated Host fell to the floor in St Jacek parish, the

bishop said in a statement. The Host was placed in a container of water and red stains subsequently appeared on it.

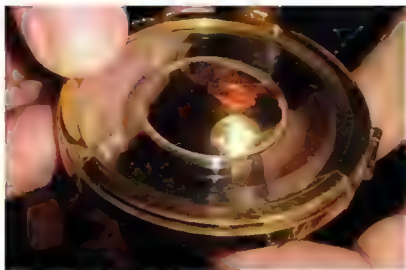
Bishop Kiernikowski said the Host bore signs of "a Eucharistic miracle" and took the matter to the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. It was recommended that a special place be found at the church for the Host to be put on display for veneration. "I hope that this will serve to deepen the cult of the Eucharist and will have deep impact on the lives of people facing the Host," the bishop said.

In February 2014, a small fragment was placed on a corporal and underwent testing by various research institutes. The final medical statement, as reported by the Catholic News Agency, said that the Department of Forensic Medicine of the Pomeranian Medical University in Szczecin found that "fragments [of the Host] contained the fragmented parts of the cross striated muscle. It is most similar to the heart muscle. Tests also determined the tissue to be of human origin, and found that it bore signs of distress."

## TESTING THE CLAIMS

For at least 1,000 years claims of Eucharistic miracles have been carefully examined by the Church, as the interest of Pope Urban IV in the Corporal of Bolsena illustrates. The Lanciano miracle has undergone several investigations. When, initially, the Host appeared to be flesh and blood, the evidence was carefully weighed and the five globules, although of different sizes, were found apparently to be the same weight.

They were placed in a special ivory reliquary, but not hermetically sealed. In 1574, a Monsignor Rodrigues once again weighed the five globules in the presence of witnesses and arrived at the



**ABOVE LEFT:** The bleeding fragment of the Host from the Buenos Aires miracle of 1996. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The bleeding communion wafer first seen by a nun in Tlaxita Mexico, in 2006. **BELOW:** Doctor Frederick Zugibe investigated the Buenos Aires case and the Turin Shroud, as well as conducting the odd crucifixion in his lab.

same conclusion. He noted too that, eight centuries after the original events, no visible sign of deterioration had taken place.

In 1713, the original ivory reliquary was replaced by one of silver and crystal, with the globules of blood being put in a crystal chalice (which some believed was the actual chalice when the miracle occurred).

In the 20th and 21st centuries scientists have been involved in examining new cases and using new techniques to examine historic evidence. According to many believers, what they have discovered has not undermined the miraculous claims but strengthened the case for their authenticity. Much quoted is the Buenos Aires miracle of 1996, which, interestingly, links with the Lanciano case. On the evening of 18 August that year an unconsumed Host was found in the church of Santa Maria y Caballito Almagro in Buenos Aires, Argentina. A parishioner handed it to a priest, Father Alejandro Pezet, who put it in a container of water and placed it reverently in a tabernacle in the chapel of the Blessed Sacrament.

Eight days later Father Alejandro discovered that the Host had changed in appearance. It seemed to have grown in size and become bloody. Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, Father Alejandro's superior, advised that the Host be photographed, and this was done on 6 September. Cardinal Bergoglio, later elevated to become Pope Francis, instructed that the episode be kept secret and that the Host be kept carefully under wraps.

Three years later, on 5 October 1999, the cardinal arranged for a sample of the bloody fragment to be sent for analysis. So as not to prejudice the study the laboratory was not told the sample's history. The *Catholic Herald* later reported that results came back

showing the blood was group AB and was indeed human.

Another sample was sent to the late Dr Frederick Zugibe, a retired American forensic pathologist and one-time professor of pathology at Columbia University, New York. In addition to his 30 years of experience, during which he conducted an estimated 10,000 autopsies, Dr Zugibe was well-known for his interest in the scientific investigations into the Shroud of Turin (see FT326:38-41).

The results of his investigation into the material from the bleeding Host were announced on 26 March 2005. He identified the sample as human flesh and blood and testified that it was a fragment of heart muscle. It was, he said, in an inflammatory condition and contained a large number of white blood cells. This indicated to him that the heart was alive at the time the sample was taken, as white blood cells die outside

a living organism. He stated that "the heart had been under severe stress, as if the owner had been beaten severely about the chest."

However, the Buenos Aires story was not finished, as it came to be linked with the much earlier Lanciano 'miracle'. In 1970, Pope Paul VI permitted a series of scientific studies to substantiate, or undermine, the Lanciano legend.

According to The Catholic Education Resource Centre, Dr Edoardo Linoi, professor of anatomy and pathological histology, chemistry and clinical microscopy, and head physician of the hospital of Arezzo, conducted the study. He was assisted by Dr Ruggero Bertelli, professor emeritus of human anatomy at the University of Siena. "The analyses were performed in accord with scientific standards and documented, and Dr Bertelli independently corroborated Dr Linoi's findings. In 1981, using more advanced medical technology, Dr Linoi conducted a second histological study; he not only confirmed the findings but also gathered new information.

"The major findings from this research include the following: The Flesh, yellow-brown in colour, has the structure of the myocardium (heart wall) and the endocardium, the membrane of fibrous-elastic tissue lining all the cardiac cavities. These have the same appearance as in the human heart. No traces of preservatives were found in the elements. The blood was also of human origin with the type AB. Proteins in the clotted blood were normally fractionated with the same percentage ratio as those found in the sero-proteic make-up of normal, fresh human blood."

Linoi's findings were published in the medical journal *Quaderni Scavo di Diagnostica Clinica e di Laboratorio* in 1971.

He found significant the fact that the



blood group was AB, a comparatively rare group that is found, however, more predominantly in the Middle East than in Italy (and, he claimed, the same blood group as that of the man of the holy Shroud of Turin). He also said that the samples should have deteriorated, given that they were centuries old. They had never been hermetically sealed from the air and yet they had preserved the same properties as might be found in fresh human blood and flesh.

Several Catholic websites report that in 1973, the Higher Council of the World Health Organization (WHO) appointed a scientific commission to verify the Italian doctor's conclusions and confirmed what had been stated and published in Italy.

In reporting this supposed link between the Buenos Aires and the Lanciano miracles – that both samples appeared to be of the same unusual AB blood group – some accounts have extrapolated further. In one Youtube video, claims were made that not only was the blood group identified, but DNA as well. Some believers have even claimed that DNA extracted from the Argentinian bleeding Host was found to match DNA taken from the Lanciano sample, and even more remarkably, that both matched DNA found on the Turin Shroud.

The only problem with this story is that while human DNA was found in dust particles taken from the Shroud, they did not have a single identifiable source. To quote from the report of the research published in *Nature*: “a large number of different human sequences corresponding to three distinct mtDNA loci were identified. This result not only indicates that human DNA was indeed unequivocally present in the dust, but also that the sources of

human DNA could be ascribed to numerous individuals. In fact, the mtDNA haplotypes were found to belong to different branches of the human mtDNA tree, even after having excluded all the mtDNA sequences that could be theoretically attributed to operator contamination.” In other words, the Shroud had been handled by so many people over the years that to pinpoint the DNA from the original corpse buried in it was impossible.

### PUZZLING EVIDENCE

Claims of scientific verification of tales of the miraculous tend to hit four main problems. Firstly, sourcing the claims can be difficult. In general, the scientific evidence is only cited in hearsay versions on dedicated Catholic websites and not in mainstream scientific, peer-reviewed journals. In particular, why does the

corroborative investigation conducted, supposedly, by the WHO prove impossible to source? The WHO body involved, described as the Higher Council, does not even appear to exist in the WHO organisational structure.

The scientific claims follow a well established pattern found in websites run by enthusiasts who are dedicated to their own marginal causes, whether conspiracy theories, alien sightings or imminent apocalypses. Claims are freely circulated around the families of websites, each one quoting the other as substantiation, but none providing irrefutable and checkable source material. One unnamed correspondent to the website *Catholic Answers Forums* in 2007 was particularly scathing. “According to various Catholic websites, the physician Dr Edoardo Lanoli examined the Eucharistic Host at Lanciano and found it to be composed of human heart muscle. And the Blood was human blood, type AB. The findings are only found on the Catholic websites. This sounds similar to the “Oil well to Hell” hoax that many Fundamentalist Protestants still fall for to this very day and suggests that the Catholic websites have unwittingly parroted a lie.”

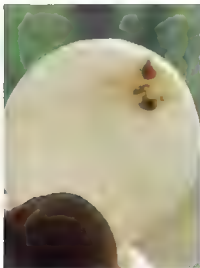
Secondly, even sourced scientific reports of tests do not provide corroborating evidence of how samples were presented. Where individual institutions have a special interest in having a miracle confirmed, attempts might be made to dupe reputable scientists with sample substitutes. The Lanciano tissue could have been tampered with at any time over hundreds of years. The best that scientific laboratories can hope to do is state what they find in what they are given to examine – but there is no scientific test that proves a sample might once have been Communion bread.

Thirdly, it is often the case that the Church calls on the services of scientists who are themselves not impartial investigators and who have previously taken a special interest in alleged miracles and have a personal, faith-based motivation to substantiate them.

And fourthly, even when reports can be sourced, the evidence is far from clear. The most celebrated and most studied holy relic is the Shroud of Turin, and over time scientific claims have been far from consistent. After carbon dating tests pooched claims that the Shroud was 2,000 years old, came other tests on pollen, dust and nanoparticles. Believers interpreted the various results as supporting the claim that the Shroud was the burial cloth of Christ; sceptics took the opposite view. Most recently, in July 2017, a report into an analysis of nanoparticles from the Shroud seemed to corroborate the theory that it was used as a burial cloth and contradicted previous theories that it was made in medieval times. Professor Giulio Fanti, one of the authors of the research, said: “The presence of these biological nanoparticles



TOP: Betania, Venezuela, was home to a series of Marian apparitions in the 1970s and 1980s. Here, a vendor sells photos of some of the visions. ABOVE: St Jacek Church in Poland, where a bleeding Host was approved as a miracle by the local bishop and reportedly found to contain human tissue.



**ABOVE LEFT:** Skeptics argue that discoloration due to mould or other contaminants can leave marks on communion wafers that believers interpret in the light of faith. **ABOVE CENTRE:** A frame from Daniel Sanford's video of the bleeding Host of Betania. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The Salt Lake City Host of 2015 – probably red mould, not blood

found during our experiments point to a violent death for the man wrapped in the Turin Shroud."

Further scientific studies, of course, may produce yet another swing in the pendulum of evidence.

Another claim of evidence to support a miraculous Eucharistic event has come in the form of video footage. In the village of Betania in Venezuela there is a shrine celebrating the apparitions of the Virgin Mary which are said to have occurred there. In the 1970s and 1980s there were said to be at least 30 appearances in which the mother of Jesus warned of impending war and suffering. On one occasion in 1984, 108 people claimed to have seen an apparition. The shrine is a popular local site of pilgrimage and on 8 December 1991, Father Otty Ossa Aristizábal was celebrating Mass in the chapel when the Host began to bleed. Reports say that it appeared to be spurting blood as if from a wound. He and the congregation immediately recognised the event as a miracle and today the miraculous Host is preserved in the city of Los Teques at the convent of the Augustinian Recollects Nuns of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, where it is on permanent display and attracts hundreds of pilgrims a year.

In 1998, an American pilgrim, Daniel Sanford, went to Betania with an organised prayer group from Medford Lakes, New Jersey. On 13 November, the group went to see the famed Bleeding Host of Betania. After Mass, they opened the door of the tabernacle that contained the Host. "The Host was in flames, bleeding, and there was a pulsating heart bleeding in the centre of the Host. I watched this for about 30 seconds or so, then the Host returned to normal. However, I did manage to film this miracle with my camcorder!" Sanford's

video has been viewed over 140,000 times on YouTube (you can see it at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=jqsRDD6kXWY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jqsRDD6kXWY)). He shot the footage without a tripod and the camera-work is very wobbly. The supposed heartbeat of the Host is inconsistent, depending, it seems, on the camera angle at the time. The low quality of the visual evidence prevents proper study of the claim. Skeptics will easily dismiss the illusion as a trick of the light or the consequence of seeing the Host through distorted glass.

### MOULDY OLD DOUGH

In many cases, sceptics would argue that something as simple as mould or some other contaminant might be responsible for discolouring or leaving marks on a wafer. In the context of faith, it is quite plausible that such discolourations are interpreted imaginatively; that these interpretations can become charged with religious significance for the faithful is again all entirely within the bounds of possibility.

Relevant here – and common to several claims of Eucharistic miracles – is the code of practice that priests are advised to follow when a Communion Host becomes in any way contaminated: it has to be placed reverently in water until it dissolves.

In 2015 a Communion wafer was returned to the priest at St Francis Xavier Church in Kearns in Salt Lake City, Utah. It had been given in error to a young child. He duly placed it in water according to the protocol. After several days, the Host developed a red colour. Some parishioners said it appeared to be bleeding (see FT336:20). The diocesan authorities set up a committee of enquiry and commissioned scientific tests. To the disappointment of some believers the conclusion was that the discolouration was not supernatural and most probably attributable

to red mould.

The diocese stressed the need for Catholics to avoid "rash speculation" about miraculous claims. Monsignor M Francis Mannon said that while such miracles had happened in the past, "false claims of miracles cause harm to the faithful and damage the Church's credibility." He said the investigating committee had been appointed "in the wake of excitement generated by the premature and imprudent display and veneration of the Host".

That a similar red bread mould might explain many other cases in which Hosts have been placed in water seems not improbable. However, once a miracle has been announced it is difficult to backtrack – unless, as in the case of the Salt Lake City diocese, a prompt and impartial investigation is carried out. Another suggested explanation for human blood being found on Communion bread is that it is the blood of the priest who, perhaps inadvertently, has contaminated the evidence. A drip of blood from a slight nose-bleed or a small cut on a finger might be a possible explanation.

Whatever the cause, and the Church authorities do not rule out the very rare possibility of supernatural intervention, what really creates the 'miracle' is the popular response to an event. A miracle is something that creates wonder in the eyes of beholders. If believers experience a sense of wonder, whatever the cause or mundane explanation, that event can become to them a thing of holiness and a faith-enhancing experience.

◆ **TED HARRISON** is a writer, artist, television producer and former BBC religious affairs correspondent. A regular contributor to FT, his latest book is *The Death and Resurrection of Elvis Presley*.



# Doggy Detective

The brutal murder of a young girl in 1876 shocked and scandalised the northern town of Blackburn, and its baffled police force seemed powerless to apprehend the killer. Enter an unlikely saviour in the form of Morgan the bloodhound... **JAN BONDESON** recounts an exciting exploit of canine crime-fighting and "wonderful sagacity".

On 28 March 1876, the seven-year-old Emily Agnes Holland told her friends at St Alban's School in Blackburn, Lancashire, that she had just met a nice man, for whom she would run some errands. She came home from school and went out to play, but then was nowhere to be found. After her father, the mechanic James Holland, of 110 Moss Street, had gone to the police, the relevant parts of Blackburn were thoroughly searched, but without anything coming to light. On 30 March, Mrs Alice White, of 73 Bastwell Terrace, was alerted by a neighbour's child, who had found a strange parcel in a field, wrapped in newspaper. A dog was sniffing around nearby, as if interested in its contents. Mrs White was horrified when she opened the parcel and found the trunk of a small girl, the head, arms and legs having all been severed by the murderer.

An extensive search was made, in the hope of finding the remaining body parts, but without any success. However, a witness named Richard Fairclough had seen a man behaving suspiciously in a lane at Lower Cunliffe. He later found a parcel containing two severed legs, perfectly matching the trunk discovered earlier. Dr William Maitland, the local police surgeon, examined the body parts. He found evidence that the little girl had been violated before she was murdered. A strong, sharp knife had been used for the mutilation. The trunk and the legs had been wrapped in old copies of the *Preston Herald*, and it interested Dr Maitland that the newspapers were covered with hair. He was curious to find that it was most likely human hair, of different lengths, colours and textures, all mingled together. Now who would have access to the hair of so



LEFT: The murder of Emily Holland, from the *Illustrated Police News* 15 April 1876. **FACING PAGE:** The cover of a rare contemporary pamphlet on the Fish case (reproduced by kind permission of Mr Stewart P Evans).

parents of Emily, identified the body as hers, from a mark on the back, although the head was still missing. Alice White and Richard Fairclough described how they had found the body parts. Mary Ellen Eccles, a little girl attending the same school as Emily, had heard her say that she was going for half an ounce of tobacco for a man she had met in the street. This individual had worn a billycock hat, a mixed cloth coat, a yellow waistcoat, dirty fustian trousers, and wooden clogs. Mr Potts, the Chief Constable, said that in his opinion, the murderer was most probably a tramp, but the coroner objected that tramps do not often carry newspapers

around with them. Three tramps had already been arrested on suspicion, and later discharged. The inquest was adjourned for a week.

The police had two witnesses who had seen the murderer: two little girls aged eight and nine, who vaguely described him as a scruffy-looking tramp. A man named Charles Taylor, a vagabond who had been begging in the Moss Street area of Blackburn, roughly matched their description, so he was arrested, and the police could proudly announce that they had a suspect in custody. Due to the suspicions of Dr Maitland, the police also took an interest in the local barbers. It was noted that one of them, William Fish, of 3 Moss Street, had a pile of old *Preston Herald*s in a corner. Fish was a man of low repute, who had been in a workhouse as an adolescent and had two previous convictions for larceny; he was 25 years old and married with two children

## Who would have access to the hair of so many different people?

many different people? Was the murderer a barber?

### "WHO MURDERED LITTLE EMILY?"

The coroner's inquest was opened on 31 March at the Blackburn Town Hall. The murder and mutilation of a blameless little girl had outraged the people of Blackburn, and a large and excited crowd gathered outside. James and Elizabeth Holland, the

ONE PENNY:

# BETRAYED BY BLOODHOUNDS



OR, THE

## Barbarous Barber of Blackburn,

BEING

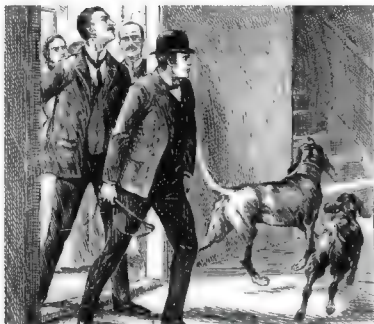
A TRUE AND GRAPHIC ACCOUNT

OF

## HIS LIFE & MYSTERIOUS PARENTAGE,

LONDON:

MORRIS & NEWMAN, 34, BOOKSELLER'S ROW, STRAND



LEFT Morgan and the Clumber spaniel rush upstairs  
 ABOVE, Morgan sniffs at the fireplace  
 BELOW, A portrait of the barber William Fish. All pictures are taken from *Famous Crimes Past & Present*

Although Fish was not charged with murder, the local residents had strong suspicions about him. His business boomed as a result, since many people came to see him as a curiosity. As the singing barber warbled "Tomorrow will be Friday, and we're caught no fish today...", a chorus of guttersnipes outside sang back "Yah boo! Barber, barber, who killed the girl?" and "Emily, Emily, who murdered little Emily?" When a woman entered his shop, to stand staring at him, the startled barber asked what she had come for. "To see a murderer!" she responded. In the end, Fish had to ask for police protection against the angry locals who kept harassing him.

When the coroner's inquest was resumed on 7 April, the tramp Charles Taylor had just been discharged due to the lack of evidence against him. Several schoolgirls had seen the man who lured Emily away, but none of them could describe him properly. The tobacconist Frederick Cox testified that he had sold half an ounce of tobacco to a little girl matching the description of Emily Holland on the day she disappeared. The inquest was once more adjourned. The police kept looking for tramps, and more local vagabonds were arrested, although nothing could be found to incriminate them. After several weeks had passed, the newspapers began to express critical sentiments: were the police entirely baffled, and would the murderer escape scot-free? But the Blackburn police found an unexpected ally: a man named Peter Taylor, of 72 Nelson Street, Preston, who was the handler of two dogs: the half-bred bloodhound Morgan, and also a clumber spaniel. These two animals were employed to search the area where the trunk and legs had been found, in the hope of finding the arms and head, but without the desired result.

## Someone suggested that dogs should be employed to search the barber's shops



**WILLIAM FISH'S DOGS**

Some bright individual suggested that the dogs should also be employed to search the two barber's shops in Moss Street. In the first shop, nothing incriminating was found, so the animals were taken to Fish's shop at No

3. Morgan led the way into the back of the shop, where he stood scenting by the door to the stairs. When the door was opened, both dogs galloped upstairs. Morgan first sniffed at some clothes in the back room, but then ran into the front room with a howl, sniffing at the fireplace and thrusting his head up it. "There is something here!" cried Mr Taylor, and after the dog had been pulled away, Emily Holland's burnt skull and arms were found thrust up the chimney, wrapped in her remaining clothes. This was the earliest instance in Britain where a dog had been instrumental in solving a murder.

Fish initially denied all involvement in the murder, but he eventually made a full confession. After abducting and raping Emily Holland in the room above the barber's shop, he had cut her throat with a razor, and dismembered the body. He had burnt the head and arms in the downstairs fireplace and tried to dispose of them up the chimney in the upstairs room, but only to be thwarted by Morgan's sagacity. Witnesses among the locals had seen a particularly large fire in the empty barber's shop, as the murderer tried to destroy the remains of poor little Emily; it was also remarked, with horror and disapproval, that the Blackburn miscreant had later shaved several people with the very same razor he had used to cut Emily's throat. No motive for the murder ever emerged, apart from perverted lust; Fish denied premeditation, but here he was probably untruthful, since a certain degree of planning had definitely gone into the plans for the disposal of the body.

As Fish was languishing in prison, rumours were buzzing about his parentage, since the good burghers of Blackburn thought that such a dastardly murderer and child-ravisher must surely be of foreign birth. Some

thought his real name was Fiesch or Fieschu and speculated that he might be related to Giuseppe Marco Fieschi, who had tried to assassinate King Louis Philippe of France. The chapbook *Betrayed by Bloodhounds* contained an even spicier version of the antecedents of "the monster known as William Fish, the fiendish violator and diabolical murderer of the poor child, Emily Holland." It was confidently stated that his maternal grandfather was one Jacopo Fieschi, a Corsican who was exiled after taking part in a Bonapartist plot and went to live in London. His widow remarried a wicked Jew named Matamores, and they took care of the little daughter Marguerite Fiesch, alias Margaret Fish. Matamores forced Margaret to marry the Italian anarchist Felice Orsini, who was later guillotined for attempting to blow up Napoleon III and his Empress in their carriage. William Fish, their only son, born at Derwen in 1850, had been forced to enter the workhouse after his mother had died from a broken heart.

Unamused by these fantasies gaining credence among the locals, Mrs Elizabeth Fish spoke out to a representative of the *Blackburn Times*: her husband was as English as they came, and the son of the block printer William Fish, born at Brinscall near Chorley and dead for 10 years. The murderer William Fish Jr was born at Derwen on 1 April 1851 and christened by the old vicar Robert Cross, known as the 'Derwen Bishop'. Far from being an only child, he had two brothers and two sisters living, and his father's twin brother was also still alive, at the age of 75.

William Fish, the Demon Barber of Blackburn, was charged with murder and committed to stand trial at the Lancaster Assizes; he was found guilty and was hanged at Kirkdale Prison, Liverpool, on 14 August 1876. There was as little pity or sympathy for a creature of his description back in 1876 as there would have been today, and there was jubilation in Blackburn as the detested child murderer was launched into eternity. Fish's final words was a public-spirited appeal to other would-be killers: "I wish to tell you, while you have a chance, to lead a new life. You can see my bad end through breaking off Sunday-school, and through bad companions. Those were happy days when I attended Sunday-school. After I neglected it I went from bad to worse, and so I have brought to this sad end. If I had my time over again I would lead a different life. It is not too late for you to mend. Avoid those bad cheap journals on which I wasted so much spare time. May we meet in heaven, through God's mercy!"

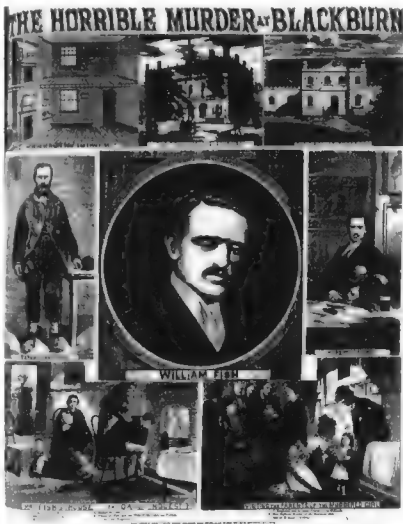
#### A CANINE PARAGON

As for the half-bloodhound Morgan, he was the hero of the hour. After the police had been entirely baffled, this paragon of canine virtue had brought the murderer to justice and vindicated the blameless memory of little Emily Holland. Although

the dog had been handled by Mr Taylor during its crime-fighting exploits and lived with an innkeeper named Thomas Bailey, its rightful owner was Mr James Parkinson, a lamp and oil merchant in Church Street, Preston. And indeed, in a swift dawn raid, Mr Parkinson came to call at Bailey's beerhouse with a troop of assistants and secured the ownership of Morgan. He explained to journalists that the dog was his: this sagacious animal had been brought up with the greatest of care, and when Parkinson got dressed, he could empage Morgan as his butler, since the dog could fetch his clothes and boots from the wardrobe. Morgan had always been a highly-strung dog, and in his younger years, he had been disposed to attack and bite tramps and other scruffily dressed people. After Morgan had bitten a certain Mr Lamb, Parkinson gave the dog to a man named Spencer, a resident of Bolton, for the animal to be re-educated to abolish

his vicious tendencies. But Spencer had illicitly sold the dog to a druggist named Smith for 10 shillings, and Morgan had been handed over to a farmer, and then to Bailey, who had been taking care of the dog for seven months.

Mr Parkinson was offered £200 for Morgan, but he turned this offer down, instead taking £6 an evening from a Blackburn theatre, where the dog was exhibited before the curious. Morgan was petted by the people of Blackburn and Preston, and many stories were told about his wonderful cleverness. Mr Parkinson could employ his dog to fetch various objects from his warehouse to his house, he boasted, and if he had dropped a glove in the market-place, he could send Morgan to retrieve it. A letter to the *Dundee Courier* praised the public-spirited Mr Parkinson and his wondrous hound: "I also hope that some photographer will give us a picture



ABOVE: A portrait of William Fish, and other scenes from the Blackburn murder case, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 6 May 1876.

**PORTRAIT**  
**OF THE PRESTON HOUND**  
**"MORGAN"**  
 WHO  
**WITH SUCH WONDERFUL SAGACITY,**  
**DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF**  
**ON THE 16TH. OF APRIL, 1876,**  
**BY DISCOVERING**  
**THE MUTILATED REMAINS**  
**OF THE CHILD,**  
**EMILY HOLLAND**  
**AT BLACKBURN,**  
*So cruelly murdered by the Barber*  
**FISH,**  
 After the Police had been  
 completely baffled.

He is the property of  
**MR. THOMAS PARKINSON.**  
**18, CHURCH STREET, PRESTON.**



ABOVE: Front and back of a contemporary cabinet card celebrating Morgan's great exploit. Note that the dog is not looking very formidable for being a bloodhound cross.

portrait of Morgan and that he (Morgan) will get a silver collar with an inscription thereon giving day and date when he, with unwonted display of sagacity, handed over that bloodthirsty Fish to justice. "When Mr Bailey became aware of Morgan's extensive fame, and the dog's value to the showmen, he took Mr Parkinson to court at the Manchester Assizes, but Parkinson emerged as the undisputed owner of the famous dog.

After exhibiting Morgan for several months, and milking the valuable animal for all he was worth, Mr Parkinson gave the dog into the care of Mr Spencer, who appears to have been an expert dog-handler. In 1881, when the embalmed body of the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres was stolen from the family mausoleum in Duncricht near Aberdeen, Mr Spencer and Morgan were called in to help search for it. Mr Spencer told a newspaper reporter that, apart from his heroism in Blackburn, Morgan had once tracked a pair of poachers for a distance of 17 miles, being instrumental in capturing them. He was optimistic with regard to finding the Earl's kidnapped body: if it was not too deeply buried, the hound would find it. The Earl's body was recovered by more conventional means, however, and a local poacher was imprisoned for stealing it.

In June 1884, the body of eight-year-old Mary Cooper was found in shrubbery in Albert Park, Middlesbrough. She had been sexually assaulted, and her throat had been cut. Inspector Swanson, of Scotland Yard, who was put in charge of the case, suggested that the celebrated Morgan should once more be called in as an auxiliary crime-fighter. This time, Mr Parkinson's son-in-law handled the dog, which was transported from Preston to Middlesbrough on the railway. When led to the shrubbery where the body had been found, Morgan gave a howl, before sniffing around with interest, and seemingly following several tracks. Nothing valuable came of this experiment, however, and the murderer of Mary Cooper was never found.

In 1888, when the newspapers discussed the employment of bloodhounds in the hunt for the elusive Jack the Ripper, Morgan's great feat of 1876 was mentioned more than once as a sterling example of canine sagacity, but by this time, the celebrated Preston half-bloodhound had himself long since expired.

This article is extracted from Jan Bondeson's book *Victorian Murders* (Amberley Publishing, 2017).

♦♦ JAN BONDESEN is a senior lecturer at Cardiff University, a regular contributor to FT and the author of numerous books, including *Murder Houses of London* (2014) and *Strange Victoriana* (2016). His latest book, *Victorian Murders*, is currently available from Amberley Publishing.



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## STOP ALL THE CLOCKS

**SD TUCKER** rolls back the decades to the earliest days of the Soviet Union in search of the Russian diplomat Valenian Muraviov, father of the forgotten Communist plot to gain control over time.

In 1928, a strange little volume named *Ovlatenie Vremeni, or Control Over Time*, hit the bookshelves of the new Workers' Paradise of post-Revolutionary Russia. Published at the author's own expense, the book laid out a comprehensive programme for the alchemical transformation of mankind, with the ultimate aim of freeing a new, post-Soviet breed of collectivised humanity from the bonds of time itself. The author, however, was not some lone crank sitting in his garden shed and claiming to have invented a time-machine – indeed, he dismissed such an HG Wells-style idea as being one of unacceptable bourgeois individualism – but a well-connected Russian diplomat sitting at the heart of the new Bolshevik governmental machine. A gifted linguist with a brilliant intellect, Valerian Muraviov (1885-1932) proved highly useful to the early Red regime. He was acquainted with Leon Trotsky, and this was a friendship that proved useful to Muraviov at first. However, once Trotsky fell out of official favour, this alliance became more of a liability than an asset, with Muraviov being arrested as an 'enemy of the people' in 1929 and packed off to internal exile in Russia's frozen far north, where he died of typhus in 1932. It turned out that Muraviov's rather esoteric hopes for the alchemical, time-abolishing future of Communism were not shared by those who held the real power at the top of the Party. In the immediate aftermath of the Revolution of 1917, however, he could have been forgiven for thinking otherwise; what follows is not a wind-up.

### A GREY CUBE IN RED SQUARE

In 1924 the Soviet Union's first leader, Lenin, died. Or did he? Some influential Bolsheviks at the time simply refused to accept the sad news, and insisted that he was merely sleeping. In particular, one Leonid Krasin (1870-1926), Soviet Commissar of Trade, and the man who had enabled the Bolsheviks to stay afloat financially post-1917, had trouble adjusting to reality and insisted upon keeping his hero's corpse firmly above-ground. Most people who hang onto the dead bodies of loved ones and refuse to allow them burial are pointed firmly in the direction of the nearest loony-bin; Krasin, though, found himself indulged. Made head of a new



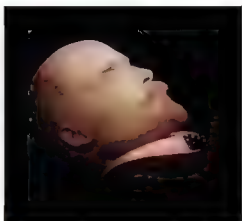
**LEFT** Leonid Krasin: head of the Immortalisation Commission responsible for designing Lenin's tomb

## EARTH WOULD BE TRANSFORMED INTO A GIANT SPACESHIP

'Immortalisation Commission', the trained engineer was handed responsibility for creating Lenin's tomb. However, a tomb was not precisely what the authorities got from Krasin. Instead, he built them a time-machine. Krasin had a touching faith in the future ability of Soviet science to perform wonders. He was "certain", he said, that Communist doctors would one day be able to resurrect the dead, a task which would obviously be made easier if their corpses could be preserved properly. With this in mind, Krasin commissioned the architect AV Shchusev to design Lenin's tomb, partly on account of Shchusev's unusual beliefs. Shchusev was a fellow traveller of the Russian Futurist movement in literature and the arts, several of whose members also refused to accept the death of Lenin. "Lenin, even now, is more alive than all the living!" proclaimed the Futurist poet Vladimir Mayakovsky when the great man's death had been officially announced, before penning the propaganda slogan "Lenin lived! Lenin lives! Lenin will live!" for the use of his Party masters.<sup>1</sup>

More significant in the eyes of Shchusev, however, was the work and thought of the Russian-Polish Futurist-Suprematist painter Kazimir Malevich, best known today for his 1915 painting of a black square which is meant (amongst other things) to depict eternity. Undoubtedly, Malevich loved all things square and cubic; these days, he would live on a diet exclusively of Square Crisps, get square-eyed through watching too much television, spend his leisure-hours trying to solve the eternal riddle of the Rubik's Cube, and hang all his works in London's White Cube Gallery. Inspired by Theosophy and the writings of the Russian mystic PD Ouspensky, Malevich believed that geometrical shapes represented a higher reality existing beyond the human world. With this in mind, Malevich proposed that the shape of Lenin's tomb should definitely be that of a cube, because cubes, in his view, represented the fourth dimension, a timeless zone which somehow enabled people to escape death. By placing Lenin's corpse within a giant grey cube, said Malevich, it would ensure that he lived on in a "supra-material kingdom of the ideal spirit". These brand-new Futurist-Suprematist cubes of his, he claimed, were time-machines which partially occupied the fourth dimension itself, and so had magical, death-defying properties. "Lenin's death is not death," argued Malevich, and a Communist cube was no longer really a cube, but "a new object, taking as its form the cube... with which we can maintain Lenin's eternal life, defeating death."

Shchusev liked the idea, and designed a tomb for Lenin consisting of a trio of cubes corresponding to the Holy Trinity, one of whose members had famously come back to life Himself, 2,000 years previously. Krasin liked the idea too, but insisted that a large German refrigerator also be placed inside the mausoleum for Lenin to rest in, just in case. Then, when Russian science had advanced far enough, the frozen leader's soul could be summoned back into our own time-frame to reanimate his body to guide the nation once again. For good measure, Malevich proposed that miniature magic cubes be distributed to the proletariat so



ABOVE: One of Vh Stukov's designs for Lenin's mausoleum on Red Square. ABOVE RIGHT: Lenin's embalmed body, photographed for the first time in 30 years in 1991. BELOW: Nikolai Fedorov, Moscow librarian, philosopher and leading light of Russian Cosmism.

they could set up cubic shrines called 'Lenin Corners' in their homes and factories, thus allowing them to meditate upon how Communism had freed mankind from time and death – a suggestion which was accepted. When Malevich himself died in 1935, he was buried in a field with a white concrete cube as a grave-marker, no doubt designed to ensure his future resurrection.<sup>2</sup>

## TEMPUS FUGITIVES

How could demonstrably intelligent and capable men like Leonid Krasin come to believe in such madness? Simply put, because such madness was very much in the air at the time. Krasin belonged to a movement called the 'God-Builders', or *bogostroitel*, who promoted the view that mankind, through advances in science and social organisation, was in the process of transforming itself into a species of living gods. Many of these God-Builders held prominent positions in government, such as Anatoly Lunacharsky, Commissar of Enlightenment, who defined God as being simply "the socialist humanity of the future", a God "not yet born, but being built." Lunacharsky, like many later commentators, viewed Bolshevism as being essentially a religious movement, with science as its new form of 'rational' magic, and was the founder of a Russian equivalent of the British SPR, where the God-like powers of Communist super-men of the future, like telekinesis and telepathy, were researched; all those later Cold War tales of Nina Kulagina and her psychokinetic ilk have their ultimate origins with Lunacharsky and his God-Builders.<sup>3</sup>

The God-Builders themselves, though, were the inheritors of another tradition now known as 'Russian Cosmism', the bizarre creation of the ascetic Moscow librarian and philosopher Nikolai Fedorov (1829-1903). Almost unpublished in his own lifetime,

the true scope of Fedorov's thinking was only revealed with the posthumous printing of an anthology of his writings dubbed *The Philosophy of the Common Task*, which laid out his unlikely argument that mankind had a sacred duty to resurrect our ancestors, all the way back to Adam and Eve, by hoovering up their "ancestral dust" and then patching it all together again. Nothing was to disrupt this plan; if any dust had floated off into space, then Earth would have to be transformed into a giant spaceship to recapture it, the ultimate aim of the programme being to achieve total "knowledge and control over all atoms and molecules" in the Universe. Once this had occurred, Eden would be scientifically restored, death, illness, hunger, war, work and all other ills could be abolished forever. Even sex would be discontinued as, with the dead living forever, there would be no need for reproduction. Then, instead of eating animals or crops, humanity would



eventually evolve into "autotrophic" beings, feeding off sunlight and thin air. Gradually, we would shed each of our body parts in turn, transforming into a race of asexual super-psychic space-plants, living in what Fedorov called "rich mind-fields", merging with the Universe itself and becoming an inseparable part of it.<sup>4</sup>

Amongst the early wave of Bolsheviks, there were plenty who would have deemed themselves Cosmists as well as Communists. Indeed, to some the two terms seemed inseparable. However, such Fedorovian wonders could only be achieved by everyone pulling together and following the same path. In the era of Tsar Putin, we are always being told that the Russian people love a strong leader. Fedorov would have agreed, feeling that the Tsars of his own day had been given the divine task by God of bringing all lands under their rule and making Moscow into a 'New Rome', from which all human endeavour was to be directed. No friend of individualism, he argued that his Common Task had to be overseen by a ruthless Russian autocrat. Dictatorship, he said, represented "the duty to the dead of all the living", whereas democratic constitutions represented only the selfish desire of the living to be free, or "the recognition of amusement and play as the goal of life", rather than the holy task of resurrecting the dead.<sup>5</sup> Put a Soviet spin on that, however, and you get an image not unlike that of the absolute dictator Stalin doing whatever he likes in the name of World Revolution. Bizarrely, some incurable optimists amongst the Cosmists began to speculate that Stalin was murdering so many people following his full accession to power in 1929 simply so that he could later resurrect them, within the New Soviet Eden.<sup>6</sup> Before he was sent off to Siberia, perhaps Valerian Muraviov would have been one of these same deluded fools

## TIME AND MOTION

According to Fedorov, "progress is veritable Hell, and the truly divine, truly human task is to save the victims of progress, to take them out of Hell!"<sup>7</sup> One way to do this would be to remove humankind from the flow of time's river entirely, as Muraviov proposed to do, an alternative attempt at merging humanity with the Universe to Fedorov's dream of turning us all into quasi-incorporeal psychic space-plants.<sup>8</sup> Like Fedorov, Muraviov was steeped in alchemical thought, as can be seen from some of the passages in *Control Over Time* describing laboratory experiments into a process he termed "the resurrection of water". As everyone knows, water is made from two parts hydrogen to one part oxygen. However, it is possible to separate the oxygen from the hydrogen in a lab, and thus 'kill' the water. By recombining the two elements, though, the skilful Communist could then resurrect the water's ghost back from its brief sojourn within the fourth dimension with Lenin, a process Muraviov deemed to be one of time-travel, or at least "limited time-reversal", but which sounds not unlike the medieval alchemists' old idea of reflux-distillation.<sup>9</sup> Muraviov's thinking here was inspired by the medical experiments of another contemporary God-Builders named Alexander Bogdanov, Lenin's one-time leadership rival, and a pioneer in the art of blood-transfusion. Unfortunately, Bogdanov eventually ended up accidentally killing himself after a bout of ill-advised self-experimentation in this field, but his early, more successful adventures in medical vampirism had, he thought, made him feel much younger and fitter – it was almost as if he had managed to reverse time itself.<sup>10</sup>

Bogdanov's key idea was that of *ovladenie*, or 'control', and we will recall that *Okladenie Vremeni* was the original Russian title of Muraviov's book. In this, both men followed Fedorov, who also felt that mankind's ultimate destiny was to control creation; he envisaged super-sciences of the future,



LEFT: Alexander Bogdanov.

in which, for example, weather-forecasting would become weather-control. Humanity could already measure time, so for the Cosmist Muraviov the next step was for us to direct it. His definition of time, though, was that it was nothing more than an expression of change and motion. The hands on clocks, the procession of the Sun and planets, the decay of biological matter we call 'aging', all these signs we use to measure the passage of time were based, ultimately, upon things moving or changing. Stop all movement and decay, therefore, and you would also stop time. But how? The problem was, said Muraviov, one of *mnazhestvo*, or 'multiplicity'. Einstein had recently shown how there were multiple time-frames in existence; his Theory of Relativity implied that the closer to the speed of light you travel, the slower you age. There was also a difference between external time, as measured on calendars, and internal time, as measured by the psyche, a determined Stakhanovite worker, for example, could get a job done in half the time of a demotivated wreck, for whom the endless hours in the tractor-factory tended to drag. Such dissenting independence of

thought created kinks in time which only impeded efficiency.

The remedy was to get everything and everybody operating in unison within all possible time-frames at once – and the only way to do that was through the compulsory collectivisation of labour. For Muraviov, as for many bureaucrats, all people and things were reducible ultimately to numbers, so he proposed that the multiple time-frames which currently existed within us should be forcibly synchronised so that society became organised upon fractal lines, like a giant Mandelbrot set. Just as when you break a twig off a tree, you see it is a smaller version of the shape of the larger branch whence it came, so it should be with the proletariat; each man's internal calendar should look precisely the same, though smaller, as that of the gigantic external calendar of society as directed by Lenin or Stalin, with their beloved Five-Year Plans. In this way, the individual is reunited with the greater Marxist collective in the same way the alchemists sought to join together the microcosm of their own psyches with the macrocosm of the entire Universe. If everything moved at precisely the same speed and in the same direction, then movement itself – and time – would stop, and all become one. The only true freedom, therefore, was to be found in submission to a greater will; that of the time-controlling Soviet dictator, who now wound up the very clock of civilisation itself. Muraviov termed this social model one of a "Cosmocratic Government", which should envelop the entire globe, and from which dissent should be made impossible. But what to do with anyone who *did* dissent? Muraviov doesn't specifically say so, but the obvious answer was to seal them all within non-cubic coffins, then banish them into the fourth dimension of death forever... a measure which, ultimately, the real-life government of the USSR proved all too happy to implement.

## NOTES

Muraviov's writings have not been translated into English within our time-frame, so my summary of his life and thought is taken from George M Young, *The Russian Cosmists: The Esoteric Futurism of Nikolai Fedorov and His Followers*, OUP, 2012, pp208-214

1 John Gray, *The Immanentist Commission*, Penguin, 2012, p157. See also Galtzer Rosenthal (Ed.), *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, Cornell UP 1997, p406. A disillusioned Mayakovskian later satirised the non-appearance of Soviet control over time

and death in his plays *The Bugbear* and *The Bath-House*

2 Gray, pp157-167. Rosenthal, pp405-406. Lenin's tomb has since been altered and added to several times and now looks nothing like a trio of grey cubes.

3 Gray, pp141-144

4 Young, pp46-51, 76-91. Following the writings of the political scientist Eric Voegelin, it has become common to compare early Bolshevik thought to Gnosticism, a mystical school which taught that matter was evil, and of mankind's need to escape

from it into a world of pure spirit. Whilst Fedorov wasn't actually a Communist, the use made of his ideas about humanity evolving into incorporeal plant form by later Soviet thinkers certainly chimes with Voegelin's idea

5 Young, pp73, 88.

6 Young, pp179-180.

7 Young, p88.

8 Although Muraviov is careful never to mention Fedorov by name in *Control Over Time* possibly because his teachings never gained specific approval, and were ultimately suppressed – he was

certainly a Cosmist himself. In 1934, an essay of his on something called 'Universal Productive Mathematics' appeared posthumously in a (cosmist?) collection of Fedorovian-Marxist essays entitled *The Universal Task, Issue 2*. His ambitious wish to fill the globe with pyramids, zigzags, skyscrapers and onion-domes fitted with huge antennas to absorb and emit cosmic-rays also has echoes of some of Fedorov's wilder thinking, likewise his desire to abolish sex and create homo-unculi in labs.

9 Reflux distillation occurs when a liquid is heated

within a vessel and evaporates into a gas which then condenses back into liquid droplets. These then drop back into the original liquid, only to be heated and evaporated again, *ad infinitum*, thus becoming a physical symbol of eternity and resurrection

10 Young, pp185-186. Bogdanov also tried, and failed, to treat Leonid Krasin for blood-disease

For the attempts of Bolshak's left-wing President Evo Morales to make time in his country run backwards in defiance of oppressive Western imperialist modes of chronology, see FT318:9



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## My evening in a cave with David Icke

**GORDON RUTTER** meets a controversial conspiracy theory legend and finds that he's... very nice

**D**avid Icke: professional footballer, sports presenter, Green Party spokesman, Son of God, conspiracy theorist. That's a rough, chronological outline of his public career. He calls himself "a full-time investigator into who and what is really controlling the world". Or as I said, a conspiracy theorist.

For those of a certain age there is always that Wogan interview, in which a turquoise tracksuit-clad Icke proclaimed himself to be the son of God Wogan, and a nation, laughed. That was in April 1991 – 28 years ago, and yet everyone remembers it. Since then, Icke has published over 20 books and lectured all over the world to massive audiences, usually for hours on end; in some cases, for over 10 hours. You certainly get your money's worth. The books are similarly substantial, if the agents of the New World Order are battering at your door you could do worse than arm yourself with a copy of his latest tome, *Everything You Need to Know but Have Never Been Told*, which is 750 pages long.

At the end of 2017 Icke was winding down a world tour that had started the previous year. He had decided to try something a bit different – smaller, more intimate events. The first few of these were tied in with the launch of *Everything You Need to Know* and as well as the book launch there was a full meal, some music (from his son Gareth) and a two-hour talk and Q and A. I managed to catch the Edinburgh show on Monday 13 November at the spookily atmospheric Caves, which was sold out (150 people) at £85



ABOVE: David Icke at Edinburgh's atmospheric Caves; in a relaxed mood, he could probably have talked all night

*Icke says he never wants to tell people what to think*

a ticket. Everyone I spoke to was happy to be there and enjoyed the entire evening. Icke wasn't present for the meal, appearing only after everyone had eaten and then speaking for longer than the planned two hours. No one was complaining (he actually wanted to speak till 1am but the compromise was for everything to finish at 11).

For part of the time that people were eating, Icke was actually present, but we were in a back room having a chat. Like his talk, my promised 10 minutes was extended to a good half hour, so we were able to cover a few different things. First things first: what's he like as a person? Well – he's nice. He's very relaxed

and quite happy to talk – the sort of person you'd be happy to chat to in a pub. He also has a message, so when you ask him something he is quite happy to give the message. As he spoke to the audience at the end of the evening I realised that a lot of what he had said to me was what he had planned to say later. What he said was that he never wants to tell people what to think, he just wants people to think of other ways to look at what they are being told – for them to question things more.

That is what he had done; and he found that the more he questioned things the less they stood up to scrutiny. Did he believe the world was being run by shape-changing lizards? Yes; well, sort of. They project a field, and that is what we perceive. At times the field breaks down and we see the non-human frequency rather than the human frequency. Certain bloodlines are hybrids, with these beings in charge of institutions such as banks. There's the bit that causes a lot of controversy: some people think he is talking about Jews. Some venues have become closed

to him at the eleventh hour, but the talks have always gone on. Having heard him speak, having spoken to him, and having read some of his output, do I believe shape-changing lizards is code for Jews? No, I believe he means it: shape-changing lizard ruling elite, baby sacrifices, the lot. The audience loved it. They were all normal people, worried about what they were seeing happening around them. They were looking for answers, and Icke was helping them in their search. I did not hear anything that was racist. I heard a lot of conspiracy material. I heard a lot of exhorting people to think for themselves. And I saw a lot of people having a good time. I'm with Jon Ronson on this, with David Icke, what you see is what you get.

For details of future speaking engagements, including smaller shows, visit [www.davidicke.com](http://www.davidicke.com)

◆ **GORDON RUTTER** is the author of *Paranormal Edinburgh and Ghosts Caught on Film 3*. He founded and still runs the Edinburgh Fortean Society. By day, he is a biology teacher.



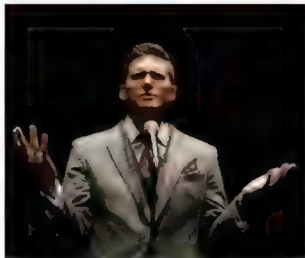
## Presidential chaos

**GARY LACHMAN** wonders whether underlying America's current political upheavals is a dark web of memes and magic: are the alt-right practising chaos magick?

If asked what single word characterised President Donald Trump's first year in office, many would answer "chaos". His numerous cabinet changes, rapid hiring and firings, and policy switches – not to mention FBI investigations – suggest as much; but, if nothing else, Trump's personal style itself tends to the unpredictable, if not the erratic. As he wrote in his self-help book *The Art of the Deal*: "I play it very loose"; "You can't be imaginative and entrepreneurial if you've got too much structure. I prefer to come to work each day and just see what develops"; "Sometimes it pays to be a little wild."<sup>1</sup>

Such tactics might work in business, politics, however, is another matter. But is Trump the only one spreading chaos?

One of the odder incidents following Trump's presidential victory happened during the annual meeting of the National Policy Institute in the Ronald Reagan Building, not far from the White House, soon after the election. Richard Spencer, leader of the NPI – a far-right organisation which had backed Trump – opened the proceedings with a chilling cheer, which was received with an even more ominous response. As Spencer declaimed "Hail Trump, hail our people, hail our victory!" the crowd responded with enthusiastic applause and not a few Hitler salutes.<sup>2</sup> But what's even stranger is that Spencer and his followers took credit for Trump's victory. He called it "a victory of the will", and declared that "We willed Donald Trump



*The essence of chaos magick is to have some practical effect*

into office, we made this dream our reality."<sup>3</sup>

Writing about this incident, New Thought blogger Harvey Bishop pointed out that making dreams a reality is the central aim of various forms of "mental science" or "positive thinking," practices of which, we know, Trump himself is a devotee.<sup>4</sup> Now it seemed that Spencer and Co. had been getting up to something similar. These and other forms of "creative visualisation" or "mind magic" share the common belief that "thoughts are things". This means that if visualised persistently enough, through sheer mental intention, an ardent wish can become a concrete reality.

The way in which Spencer and other members of the alt-right made their dream of a Trump presidency a reality, if in fact they did, was through what we



can see as a darker variant of positive thinking. They used what is known as "meme magic".

The term meme was coined by the biologist Richard Dawkins. Memes are images, symbols, slogans, or any other cultural product that can be transmitted to and imitated by others, and Dawkins believed that they serve the same function in culture as genes do in organisms. When Dawkins first coined the term, back in 1989, the main media for the dispersal of memes were books, art, music, television, films – old school stuff. Today, they spread through the Internet.

The "magic" end of meme

LEFT: Richard Spencer. Hail Trump. BELOW: The President tweeted an image of himself as Pope the Frog.

magic comes from its link to "chaos magick". What's that? Simply put, rather than stick to the spells and rituals of traditional magic, chaos magick prefers a "do-it-yourself" approach that favours the magician's personal initiative and imagination, his ability, that is, to make it up as he goes along – rather as Trump seems to be doing. Rather than fuss over wands and bells and incense, the chaos magician uses whatever is at hand; the principle is the same as with *objets trouvés* – the "found objects" that magically become "art". What is at hand for the chaos magician today are the memes propagated across the net.

The essence of chaos magick is to have some practical effect on reality – to "make things happen". In principle, it's the same aim shared by New Thought and positive thinking. Although they seem worlds apart, Rev. Norman Vincent Peale – Trump's mentor – who popularised "the power of positive thinking," and Austin Osman Spare, the transgressive artist-magician, generally recognised as the grandfather of chaos magick (see FT144:34-40), have more in common than we might at first suspect.

Meme magick started when teenage online gaming addicts recognised that images from pop culture they had been posting seemed to be having an effect in the "real" world. For instance, they saw odd coincidences between the crash of German Wings flight 9525 in 2015 and a scene from the 2012 film *The Dark Knight Rises*. Fans of the film started a thread ("Baneposting") on which they commented on the many similarities between the film scene and the real-life disaster.

For example, "Bruce Robin" was the name of one of the crash investigators, and a town near the crash site in the French Alps was called "Bain". Bane is the name of the villain in the film, Batman's secret identity is Bruce Wayne and Robin is Batman's sidekick. In the film, Bane causes the flight to crash, and the evidence suggests that Flight 9525's co-pilot crashed the plane deliberately. There are other coincidences and readers can find them at the [knowyourmeme.com](http://knowyourmeme.com/site) site.<sup>3</sup>

This phenomenon was christened "synchronismysticism."<sup>4</sup> Synchronicity is the psychologist CG Jung's name for a "meaningful coincidence", when something happening in the mind seems to be mirrored in the outer world, with no obvious connection (see FT171:42-47) – again, the basic aim of chaos magick and positive thinking. "Synchronismysticism" substitutes the Internet for the imagination. It happens when something on the net affects things in the "real" world. We can say that chaos magick – all magic in fact – works on the principle of inducing synchronicities, and the same can be said for positive thinking.

One of the principles of chaos magick is that anything can be used as a "sigil", a magical symbol or image charged with will and imagination. Chaos magick differentiated itself from old forms by appropriating images from popular culture and using them as magical tools. In the case of Spencer and Trump's "victory of the will," the icon commandeered was the cartoonist Matt Furie's slacker amphibian Pepe the Frog.

Pepe started out innocuously enough, but once launched there's no controlling a meme, and it wasn't long before he made his way to the dark side. He became a mascot for the alt-right, who posted his image all over the net. Pepe quickly became part of Trump's campaign, with images of him appearing alongside Trump and even as Trump himself. The idea was that if random posting of a scene from a film could have a



ABOVE A right wing protester holds a sign of Pepe the Frog at a rally in Berkeley, California, on 27 April 2017  
BELOW The yellow-on-black 'chaos star' used by as an emblem by Alexandr Dugin's youth movement



real effect in the real world, then the intentional repeated posting of images – memes – should produce even greater results. Several strange coincidences surrounding Pepe – which I can't go into here – made it seem that he was indeed magical. Many saw him as the incarnation of an ancient Egyptian god of chaos, with Trump as his avatar, clearing the way for his return.

In any case, Trump won, and if Spencer and his followers are correct, then meme magic must be included, along with blue-collar disenchantment and Hillary Clinton's bad reputation, as calculable reasons for his victory.

But political chaos magick isn't limited to the American far-right fringe. Years before the alt-right turned positive thinking and meme magick to its own ends, ex-Soviet dissident-turned-

establishment-intellectual and sometimes Putin advisor Alexandr Dugin hoisted the flag of chaos over a political landscape even more uncertain than Trump's chaotic presidency (see FT349:48-51).

Dugin, whose heady text *The Fourth Political Theory* proposes a "politics of chaos", has appropriated the eight-pointed "chaos star" as the emblem of his Eurasian Youth Union. This is the far-right patriotic movement – or street gang – that was unleashed on anti-Putin protesters and liberal Western diplomats when necessary. The "chaos star" itself, practically a trademark of chaos magick, began its life as an element in the British writer Michael Moorcock's "Eternal Champion" series of fantasy novels, which centre around a never-ending battle between the forces of Order and Chaos.

This is a theme Dugin reprises in his own notion of a similar eternal war between the Western "Atlanticist" seafaring people, and the mother of all continents, the Eurasian heartland. With his recent excursions into Crimea and Ukraine, Putin seems to want this heartland to expand, and the English edition of Dugin's book, *Eurasian Mission*, showing him how to do so, sports

a yellow chaos star against a dark, sombre background.

Publishers have to sell books and graphic designers help them do it. But perhaps a burning star of chaos rising against darkness suggests something more. I think it might, and in my forthcoming book *Dark Star Rising: Magick and Power in the Age of Trump* (on which this brief taster is based) I explain why.

A version of this piece originally appeared in *New Dawn*.

#### NOTES

- 1 Donald J Trump with Tony Schwartz *The Art of the Deal* (London: Century Hutchinson, Ltd., 1987) pp3, 5, 11.
- 2 [www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/21/alt-right-conference-richard-spencer-white-nationalists](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/21/alt-right-conference-richard-spencer-white-nationalists)
- 3 [www.harvishop.com/?p=959](http://www.harvishop.com/?p=959)
- 4 Michael Kranish and Marc Fisher *Trump Revealed: The Definitive Biography of the 45<sup>th</sup> President* (London: Simon & Schuster 2017) p83
- 5 <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/levantis/germanwings-flight-9525>
- 6 [www.evolveandascend.com/2017/03/09/memes-magic-and-mysticism-singing-anime-music/](http://www.evolveandascend.com/2017/03/09/memes-magic-and-mysticism-singing-anime-music/)

◆ GARY LACHMAN is a regular contributor to FT. A founding member of Bondie, he is the author of numerous books on esoteric subjects.

THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE PRESENTS

# BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

## 31. SCALING THE CROWNING HEIGHTS OF CLAPTRAP

We would guess, on our more optimistic days, that every conscientious fortean has read Martin Gardner's *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* (1957), if only because good fortune is conscientious, and it remains his best-selling book. It was based mainly on columns he wrote for *Scientific American*, if we remember correctly, and was followed by a string of such compilations, the latter several being collections of his 'Notes of a Fringe Watcher' column in *Skeptical Inquirer*. Shock, horror, gasp! We hear from certain quarters. Indeed Gardner was a founding member of CSICOP (now CSI – the Center for Skeptical Inquiry), but he was far from the standard caricature of a hardline skeptic. For a start, unlike many of his confrères he believed in God, after a Spinozan fashion, which in part drove his unappeased irritation with psi research – although what comes over far more strongly in his writing is a justified annoyance at large claims for psi founded on sloppy methods and, ergo, worthless 'evidence'. This marked parapsychologists no end – to no end, because his judgements were so apt. His other softness was that he never ever said that there was no possibility of psi, and explicitly rejected the accusation on many occasions. Another of Gardner's virtues, notably in the book we've chosen for discussion here, is that he reprints others' (sometimes quite trenchant) responses to his criticism, and responds to them, often acknowledging errors, although he usually makes sure he has the last word. But then, who wouldn't?

*Science Good, Bad and Bogus* was first published in 1981 and updated in 1989, and was followed by four collections of material from the *Skeptical Inquirer*: *The New Age* (1988), *On the Wild Side* (1992), *Weird Water & Fuzzy Logic* (1996), and *Did Adam & Eve Have Navels?* (2001). The SI-derived books have shorter but not necessarily pithier 'chapters', and Gardner often comes across as more intransigent than in fact he was. In this earlier book he's more discursive, although 27 pages on Raymond Lull's *Ars Magna* is pushing it for such a dull subject and mostly useless invention. Gardner is better, and more fun, when he gets stuck into such stuff as psychics and metal-benders and their parapsychologist friends, quack medicine, biorhythms, or the abuse of quantum theory.

Gardner, as is well known, was a prestidigitator and an expert in 'close-up' magic, and was thus well-placed to see how Uri Geller managed his various routines. This also puts him on the spot, as he doesn't want to give away any of the more esoteric trade secrets, but he still manages to explain at least half a dozen ways Geller bent keys, as well as sundry other tricks, such as wiping data from computer disks and seeming to read minds. Creating confusion and sowing misdirection, and probably having an accomplice, was a major part of Geller's act. What pains Gardner even more than

Geller's claim to use psychokinesis (PK) or telepathy is that he wasn't much cop as stage magician, so easy were his methods to detect. A really good stage conjuror fools and puzzles his fellow practitioners, after all, and Gardner reckons there are magicians who can do everything Geller did, but better. Gardner bluntly calls him a fraud. Geller started out – learned his trade – as a nightclub 'mentalists' (i.e. stage-magic mind reader) in Israel. A curious fact from history here: we once had the task of editing some articles about Geller and, in return for supplying various previously-unseen photographs of himself,

he asked to see the copy. Throughout, the author referred to him as a 'psychic'. Geller carefully crossed out every instance of the word and substituted 'mentalists'. No one picked up the clue (or cryptic confession?), the copy ran with the word 'psychic' unassailed, and Geller made not a peep of complaint.

Gardner has a laugh-out-loud chapter on Geller's discovery by Andrija Puharich, who when not inventing hearing aids and other good things was clearly as mad as a barrowload of rabid badgers. He claimed

extraterrestrials – 'the Nine' (for the full story, see David Sutton, 'From Deep Space to the Nine', *FT*215:28-33) – had told him that Geller was the chosen saviour of mankind – hence his alleged ability to contact flying saucers and perform such wonders as psychokinesis, spoon bending, telepathy, and teleportation or translocation.

As Gardner notes, these are trivial miracles indeed for a world saviour, compared to raising the dead or walking on water. His favourite translocation story is of Puharich's dog Wellington, who was just outside the kitchen one minute and outside the house the next. Heaved out quick while Puharich was out of sight? You decide. But: "A few days later Wellington, for no apparent reason, gave Uri a nasty bite on the wrist." Geller also, supposedly, teleported half a dozen children to Puharich's house. Despite all that, it would seem, the world remains singularly unsaved. Gardner's killer stroke, however,

is a simple question: "If Geller can bend a metal bar by PK, why can't he straighten it again?"

One of Gardner's most intriguing, and somewhat unnerving, chapters is not about psi, but plain ol' physics. Soviet physics in particular. We all know how Trofim Denisovich Lysenko and his immovable faith in Lamarckism drove neo-Darwinism out of Soviet biology, which proceeded to stagnate for decades. Equally well known is the Nazi allergy

to 'Jewish science' (physics from Einstein on), which was fortunate, as it turned out, since it radically inhibited the Aryan eggheads in their attempts to develop a racially pure nuclear bomb. But not so well-known is the Soviet aversion to 'bourgeois idealism' in physics. What set this gong were Heisenberg's Principle of Uncertainty and Bohr's Principle of Complementarity, both formulated to deal with the peculiar facts that you can measure an electron's speed, but not its position – and vice-versa – and that

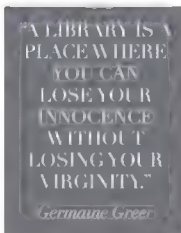
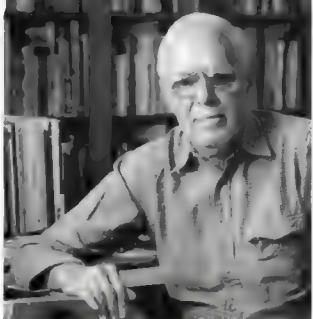


an electron can be viewed as either a particle or a wave. (Both Principles are essentially a polite way of saying 'It's weird. But hey! Live with it'.) Younger, politically militant, Soviet physicists took umbrage, for such tolerance of ambiguity flew in the face of their beloved dialectical materialism. This was in the 1930s. Then came the Second World War, ending with a bang in Hiroshima and whimpering in Nagasaki. After that, Soviet nuclear physics became big business.

Yet, bizarrely, the objections to 'reactionary bourgeois idealism' did not fade away in the interests of good science and military advantage. As the rhetoric heated up, so the older generation of physicists fell into line rather than vanish into the gulags or the bowels of the Lubyanka, as had opponents of Lysenko. One distinguished physicist's recantation claimed that Lenin had "devoted so much of his writing to physics", whereas his own textbook on mechanics had failed to be guided by "the Lenin principle of Party loyalty in science." (So when the Party declares the Earth to be flat, you'd better believe it.) Lying behind these fatal bourgeois errors were, of course, unreconstructed foreign scientists. Gardner wrote this piece in 1954, and at the time wondered if such doctrinal purity would hinder the Soviets' acquiring nuclear weapons. As it happened, espionage saved them much effort. In a postscript, Gardner notes that the climate had changed by 1962, and it was being admitted that the Soviet space programme would have been impossible if scientists had not ignored the mad Marxists among them. Lesson to fortune-tellers: believe six impossible things or even political theories before breakfast, if you must, but really, my dear, there are limits.

A quick aside: like Einstein, David Bohm had a resistance to quantum theory, and Gardner summarises his alternative hypothesis to the Principles in a single brilliant, lucid paragraph. This will save you ploughing through Bohm's *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*.

Gardner had it in for Russian psychics and their promoters as well as their political theoreticians, and has a delightful chapter deconstructing the antics of such as Nelli/Nina Kulagina and Rosa Kulshova, who claimed to be able to read with their fingertips while blindfolded, an art known in the psi trade as 'dermo-optical perception'. Gardner obligingly explains how it's done, as well as the other tricks they got up to. "In one demonstration [Rosa] correctly guessed the colour of objects by sitting on them. 'Of course,' adds [investigator] Ms G Bashkirova, 'she peeped.' (She doesn't say



with what.)"

But Gardner is internationalist in his unimpressed treatments of psi exponents. Un Geller and Ted Serios are favourites, as are 'parapsychists' and their proponents such as Hal Puthoff and Russell Targ. Prof. John Hasted (who let his 'superkid' metal-benders take home their PK tasks, and they never failed to produce the goods), the hapless Prof. John Taylor (his child subjects were taped busily cheating), who eventually recanted his initial enthusiasm, Arthur Koestler and his misunderstanding of coincidences, Lyall Watson, and Charles Tart who, he concedes, does try harder than most to create properly controlled experiments. Among other fringe figures he takes a fine swipe at the paranoid 'control system' proposed by Jacques Vallée, is not much more enamoured of J Allen Hynek, snorts unmercifully at Velikovsky, and even has a go at Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* for its threadbare plot, while admiring the stupendous special effects. Much entertainment is to be had at the expense of hokey gold-digging TV and radio preachers and L Ron Hubbard. Yet these demolitions are rarely brutally expressed – let alone righteously, which

is more than his hustling, hustling and sometimes lazy sidekick James Randi ever managed. Gardner just coolly tells it like it is, with irony to be inferred.

A few examples will illustrate the point. On Puthoff and Targ's 'remote viewing' experiments, he asks: "How do P&T know it is clairvoyance they are testing? From their point of view it could be: (1) telepathy from the experimenter (who may also have clairvoyant powers) at the target to the subject, (2) precognition by the subject of later visits to the targets, (3) PK influence by the subject and/or experimenters over the randomizer that selects the targets, (4) ESP by the judges (who were often persons... who believe themselves to be high in psi powers) in matching targets to transcripts." And if you think about it, it's not just remote viewing that's vulnerable to these vagaries of psi.

One such person involved with P&T and believing himself to be "high in psi powers" was Duane Elgin. In the mid-1970s he predicted that "in the 1990s a major war may develop between the non-psi majority in the military-industrial complex and a small band of psychic radicals who will destroy computers, weapons systems, and communication networks, perhaps even the minds of their opponents, by using their mighty PK powers." Elgin was being paid by the Stanford Research Institute as a 'futurologist' to produce this stuff. And we all remember that "major war" so well, don't we?

Another character mocked out of his own mouth is Helmut Schmidt. "In 1970, Schmidt reported one of the great breakthroughs in modern parapsychology. Cockroaches, he announced, probably have the PK ability to cause a randomizer to turn on a device and give themselves electric shocks more often than chance allows. However, since Schmidt personally dislikes cockroaches, he admits that his experiment was inconclusive. It could have been his *own mind* that influenced the randomizer." You can have fun making a list of everything that's wrong with this experiment. (And how does Schmidt know about cockroaches getting kicks from shocks?) You couldn't make it up. And he didn't.

Enjoy this book. A dose of full-on scepticism does everyone good from time to time: braces the mainframe, clears the tubes, brightens the eyes. Go for it.

Martin Gardner, *Science Good, Bad and Bogus*, Prometheus Books, 1989

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## The weft of time, not worsted...

Our image of J B Priestley as the avuncular oddball author of middle-class period pieces takes a tumble in this review of his time-twisting and prescient ideas. And he wrote a play about tulips...

### Time and The Rose Garden

Encountering the Magical in the Life and Works of JB Priestley

Anthony Peake

October 2014

Pp. 248pp. rpb. £22.95/£12.95 ISBN 9781781541518

To those who imagine the author and playwright JB Priestley (1894-1984) as an avuncular, pipe-smoking, worsted-wearing eccentric whose pre- and post-WWII plays featured old-fashioned people in stuffy drawing rooms endlessly discussing incomprehensible ideas, here is an intelligent and impassioned plea to think again. Anthony Peake's entertaining and thorough exploration of the man and his writings sensuised me to the extent to which we fortune-tellers, and perhaps society in general, have underestimated Priestley's cultural contribution. Such dramas as *Donnie Darko*, *The Butterfly Effect*, *The Matrix*, *Sliding Doors*, *Vanilla Sky* and *The Amazing Mr Blunden* are just a very few of the many that have benefited from such ideas as multiple timelines or viewpoints 'outside' our narrow experience of 'linear' time.

I remember, as a teenage SF geek and embryonic fortune teller, being besotted with the idea of time-travel, stumbling upon the books by Priestley's friend and colleague, John Dunne (1875-1949) in my local library. Like Priestley, Dunne was a military veteran, yet both transcended crass materialism to wrestle with the enigma of our conscious experience of time, especially in dreams or *déjà vu*.

I know I'm not alone in being both fascinated by the 'serious' discussion of what for me, up to then, was futuristic concepts

(i.e. as I imagined it, beyond contemporary science), and at the same time baffled by the esotericism of the underlying theories and discussion. The outcome was that I began to think there may be something to *déjà vu*, 'time slips', precognition and perhaps even the feeling one has lived before.

As Peake shows, Priestley was a solid Yorkshireman. Born in Bradford, he went to Cambridge, and after serving in WWI, became a committed socialist and a founding member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. He began writing in his 20s, graduating from articles in local papers to novels, plays, essays, biographies, lectures and broadcasts which spanned more than six decades. Besides his temporal vision, he gained a considerable reputation for skilful characterisation, thoughtful dialogue and comic observation. Priestley's BBC Sunday talks had such a positive effect on the morale of Britain on the eve of WWII that Graham Greene described Priestley as "a leader second only in importance to Mr Churchill. And he gave us what our other leaders have always failed to give us – an ideology."

The sense of hopefulness in adversity that shows through Priestley's writing and through the words of some of his characters very likely originated in his wartime experiences. He particularly mentions being buried alive in 1916, when a mortar hit the trench he was in, resulting in months in military hospitals. But as a young writer, it was his early discovery of esoteric notions within Hindu philosophy (e.g. that time and existence are illusions), that affected

**"He gave us what our other leaders failed to give us – an ideology"**  
– Graham Greene

him, flowering throughout his subsequent writing – such ideas as a 'self' greater than our everyday consciousness, that our experiences of time could be variable, glimpsing past or future events, and that multiple possibilities could exist in parallel time-lines. He added to these thoughts, the hypotheses of 'serial time' and the multiple co-existent observers that Dunne proposed in *An Experiment with Time* (1927) and its sequel.

Here is where Peake comes very much into his own. Having explored – in his own books on out-of-body experiences – the idea that consciousness can transcend space as well as time, he is probably better placed than many to appreciate the way that Priestley interpreted the notion of a transcendent and 'non local' consciousness through his plays and writings. In 'drawing back the curtain' and revealing to the reader both the methodology and the message behind such memorable plays as *Time and the Conways* (1937), *I Have Been There Before* (1938), and his masterpiece *An Inspector Calls* (1945), we can better appreciate them for the masterpieces they are.

While Peake explores the temporal themes of many other works by Priestley, including many less well known or still unperformed, he should also be

remembered as a serious writer on such topics: for example, his extended essay on precognitive dreaming and meaningfulness (synchronicity), which was added to the Aldus 1964 edition of Carl Jung's *Man and his Symbols*. And Priestley, through the medium of his 1963 radio interview, directly appealed to BBC listeners for their anomalous experiences.

Priestley and Dunne were good friends with HG Wells, but where Dunne's ideas have been said to have inspired Tolkien's abandoned novel *The Notion Club Papers* (in which a colleague dreams of Númenor), Priestley is said to have been such a 'fanboy' of Dunne's that he asked him to brief the cast of *Time and the Conways* before one of its first nights. Bizarre enough to tickle a fortune teller's fancy is Peake's discovery that Priestley wrote a play involving a tulip, a materialised thought form. The inspiration for this came via Priestley's step-daughter, who married the Dutch writer Jan de Hartog and shared with him an interest in Tibetan religion, which regards tulips as objects created during deep meditation. The result was a screenplay called *Tuber and the Tulpa*, which, in 1963, attracted the attention of the comedian Norman Wisdom, who wanted the film rights.

Peake tells me that, in the course of writing the book, he became interested in bringing to the West End, the as yet unstaged Priestley play called *Time Is, Time Was* (a phrase attributed to James Joyce. Should it ever manifest, do read this book before you see it.

Bob Rickard

★★★★★



# Champ(oll)ion

The precocious polymath who deciphered hieroglyphics was no slouch under enemy fire

## Cracking the Egyptian Code

The Revolutionary Life of Jean-François Champollion

Andrew Robinson

Harvard & Oxford, 2008  
Pp. 333pp. Hbk. \$20.00 ISBN 9780674034999

This book's main area of interest is Champollion's successful decipherment of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, but his life story is itself notable. Born in 1790, a professor by the age of 19, his childhood was spent amidst the turmoil of revolutionary France. His home town of Grenoble was loyal to Napoleon, and was assaulted by royalist forces in 1815. When enemy bombardment set its buildings on fire, the young professor ran to the library to save his manuscripts. Following Grenoble's fall, he was removed from his posts as librarian and professor and sent into exile.

Champollion had long been fascinated by the Near East's ancient languages, at 13 he had begun studying Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac and Chaldean. Since childhood, he had harboured a desire to visit Egypt, a wish fulfilled in 1828, when he became sufficiently familiar with its autocratic ruler, Muhammad Ali Pasha, as to implore him to improve the Egyptian peasant's lot in life.

His early fascination with the country and its history was stimulated by the Egyptomania that swept France (and elsewhere) after Napoleon's 1798 conquest of Egypt. Discovered in 1799 by an officer in Napoleon's army who recognised its importance, the Rosetta Stone was shipped to Paris, where facsimiles were made and circulated throughout Europe and North America. The stone, with its parallel text written in Greek,

Demotic and hieroglyphs, proved to be the key to cracking the hieroglyphic code.

Exiled to Paris in 1821, without the responsibilities of his former academic positions Champollion immersed himself in the city's many libraries, with their papyrus collections and the latest Egyptology scholarship. His masterstroke was to grasp that Egyptian hieroglyphs were not ideographic, that is, signs representing concepts. At least, this was not their primary function. Instead, he realised them to be largely phonetic, signs denoting sounds. It was during 1822-24 that he finally achieved the breakthrough of decipherment, despite having

begun this task several years before.

Evidently, this had not been a sudden flash of inspiration; but years of struggle during which Champollion had initially followed the old erroneous path that saw hieroglyphs as conceptual rather than phonetic. During this period, the English physician and polymath Dr Thomas Young was also labouring to decipher the mysterious characters. Indeed, it had been Young who, in 1814, first grasped the potential of the Rosetta Stone when he noticed that some of its hieroglyphs were encircled (a cartouche). These, he correctly surmised, were words of greater importance, such as a pharaoh's name. Accordingly, he sought the corresponding name in the Greek and Demotic texts, thus yielding a tentative transliteration.

Robinson, who has published extensively on writing systems and their decipherment, tells the story of Young and Champollion's rivalry with a flair for the dramatic, and his book, aimed at a general readership, elucidates the complex subject of hieroglyphs with verve and scholarly enthusiasm.

Chris Jossiffe

★ ★ ★ ★

## UFO Contact at Pascagoula

Charles Hickson and William Mendez

Flying Disc Press, 2011

Pp. 337pp. Hbk. \$20.00 ISBN 978193355471

On 11 October 1973, while fishing off a pier on the banks of the Pascagoula River in Mississippi, Charles Hickson, 42, and his co-worker Calvin Parker, 19, claimed to have encountered a large, oval-shaped object, out of which floated several strange, neckless, 5 ft (1.5m) tall, 'robot'-like beings with wrinkled grey, elephantine skin and three points protruding from their heads. Physically paralysed, Hickson and Parker were apparently taken inside the object, examined and then released. The object then shot up into the sky before disappearing. The experience lasted all of 15 minutes, while its aftermath was to last years.

Hickson and Parker's encounter, along with the 1961 Betty and Barney Hall abduction in rural New Hampshire, ranks among the best-known of UFO abductions.

At the time, it generated worldwide press coverage, with investigations by numerous researchers, including James Harder of the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization, and J Allen Hynek; Hynek, following an extensive interview with Hickson and Parker, and convinced by their testimony, declared that the two had had "a very real, frightening experience"; he later provided a lengthy account of the event in his seminal *The UFO Experience* (1974).

The effects of the Pascagoula contact were far-reaching – it inaugurated a massive wave of UFO sightings throughout the United States that lasted well into the following year. Hickson underwent several 'repeater' experiences, including additional sightings and telekinetic communications with otherworldly beings.

Unlike Parker, who was repeatedly hospitalised as the result of severe mental breakdowns, Hickson, perhaps benefiting from his experience as a Korean War veteran, faced the encounter head-on; he gave countless interviews, and made high-profile media

appearances, including spots on Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show* and the *Dick Cavett Show*, and participated in writing *UFO Contact at Pascagoula* (1973), the rather straightforward book under consideration here.

Originally published by a small press and long out of print, the book includes Hickson's version of these inexplicable events, as well as transcripts of interviews after the experience and subsequent hypnotic sessions. The documentation presents

an evocative, compelling portrait of an uncanny experience that continues to defy reductionist, rational thought, while simultaneously illustrating first-hand how such encounters alter the experience.

Numerous sceptics have provided possible explanations for Hickson and Parker's encounter, suggesting that it may have resulted from a hypnagogic dream state or a collective hallucination – a *folie à deux*, or "madness of two," a shared psychosis – or the result of Hickson's trauma of war, and, indeed, the principal author of *UFO Contact at Pascagoula*, reporter William Mendez, dutifully considers all these possibilities, before discarding them in favour of extraterrestrial visitation. Ultimately, however, Mendez's take, unsurprisingly given the author's profession, is more journalistic than interpretive. Yet there is more than enough raw material here for the theoretically minded student of UFO history to study and digest.

Flying Disc Press is to be commended for bringing this important historical document back into print.

Regrettably, this new edition is a woefully inept publication, marred by slapdash formatting that introduces an appalling number of typos – the title, for example, is misspelled on the spine – that prove frustratingly taxing and distracting.

Hopefully, the publisher will consider hiring a proofreader (or short of that, simply use a spell-checker) and book designer, to give this classic of UFO literature the professional presentation it deserves.

Eric Hoffman

★ ★ ★ ★



## Mystery Creatures of China

The Complete Cryptozoological Guide

David C Xu

Doctwile Publications 2018

Pp 256pp illus 142 x 102 525 95 ISBN 978 09595480 0

Every so often a book will come along that is a delightful and unexpected surprise. In his foreword, Dr Karl Shuker states that, despite his decades studying the world's animal mysteries, China was virtually the 'Great Unknown' for Western cryptozoologists. Despite their suspicions that, behind the language barrier, China's size and diversity of landscapes must include a veritable ark of life forms, all that was known to them were a few scraps gleaned from old travelogues and rare accounts by explorers or eyewitnesses.

Xu – born in Beijing and educated in the UK – has lifted the brocade curtain on a zoo more varied, richer and stranger than Western cryptozoologists could have hoped for. He remembers how, at the age of six, he saw paintings of a plesiosaur in the Beijing Zoo and was inspired to read all he could about water monsters and, from there, to cryptozoology generally. The result of his researches over the years, this book divides cryptids into six main groups (Aquatic, Humanoid, Carnivorous, Herbivorous, Reptilian and Winged), within which he presents more than 100 creatures in 98 sections.

Each cryptid is given a description (with Pinyin and English designation) and an evaluation of given explanations (a method that compares favourably with that used by the late William Corless in his *Sourcebooks*).

Many of these entries describe biological analogues of existing types; some confirming the presence of Western variants and some most probably new species. What will have fortens gawping, however, are the glimpses of mysterious creatures limited only by the Chinese imagination (and they certainly have a wonderfully rich folklore and mythology to draw upon). The 'blood-sucking blanket' of Jiangxi, for example, will excite folklorists such as

Michel Meurger. Similarly, among the merfolk, snowmen, man-bears and sword-wielding primates we find the 'tamarsk babies' of Xinjiang, a rare case of fairy-like pygmies barely a foot high. Water cryptids glide beneath the placid mountain lakes – such as Tianchi (which we have often mentioned in *FT*) – leap from rivers or are washed ashore. Here there be dragons, inevitably, but also other giant reptiles, unicorns, weird insects and very much more. So many of them, completely new to us and all brought to life with previously unseen illustrations and freshly-translated eye witness accounts.

David Xu's 'Complete Cryptozoological Guide' satisfies in almost every aspect. Beautifully illustrated with full colour photos and historical illustrations; it is written concisely and clearly with an extensive bibliography.

It is easy to see why it has veteran cryptozoologists singing its praises – and justifiably so.

Here is a book that will make an inspiring addition to the library of any school or any fortune.

Otto Milyak

★★★★★

## Gorey's Worlds

Enn Marzec

Doctwile Publications 2018

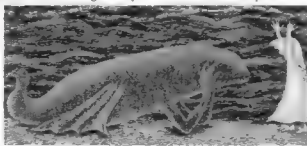
Pp 160pp illus 235 x 152 95 ISBN 978 09595480 1

Edward Gorey (1925–2000), author of *The Doubtful Guest* and



*The Gashlycrumb Times*, was an inveterate collector, though he preferred the term 'accumulator'.

He bequeathed his 19th and 20th century works on paper to the Wadsworth Athenaeum Museum of Art, and this delightful catalogue teases out the links between his own work and items from the collection. A figure study



by Balthus (1908–2001) is echoed in an illustration from *The Listing Artie*, though it is made more fanciful by the accompanying rhyme about a phantom that "beats all night long/ A dirge on a gong/ As it staggers about in the creepers." A reclining soldier reappears as a Zouave impaling a toddler. The flying fish, ships and chariots in "The Admiralty" by Charles Meyron (1821–68) are transmogrified into "A hissing swarm of bugs" making off with another unfortunate child. In a study of hats by Charles Ephraim Burchfield (1893–1967), they are transmogrified into umbrellas.

The fairly academic text is charming (yes, it can be done), but it's the images that steal the show. Lovely.

Val Stevenson

★★★★★

## The Crescent and the Compass

Islam, Freemasonry, Esotericism and Revolution in the Modern Age

Angel Miller

Brick Press 2017

Pp 272pp 195pp 140 x 102 95pp

ISBN 9780993024710

The history of European

Freemasonry is most certainly embroidered with false leads and questionable genealogies, likewise, the profligate emergence of Fringe Masonry with its baroque ritual lineages further complicates the historians' task. If we then add onto this the world of Islam, esotericism, Gnosticism and politics we are truly lost in a hall of mirrors – one that is intellectually enthralling. Miller, whose previously published histories include *Freemasonry: Foundation of the Western Esoteric Tradition* (2015) and *Freemasonry: A History* (2005) makes a worthy contribution to the unravelling of this complex narrative in *The Crescent and the Compass*.

Ambitious,

most certainly, yet what we find is a well written survey of the position of mystical theology across the spectrum of Islamic thinking and the co-fraternity it shared within the ranks of European Masonry. Historically, Miller takes us from the late medieval period right up to the present day, taking in key personalities and organisations that have shaped the history of the somewhat unlikely bedfellows of Islam and Freemasonry. Figureheads such as the 19th century freethinker and mason Jamal Al-Afghani, the founder of the first British Mosque and Moslem rights activist Shaykh Abdullah Quilliam, and Masonic powerbroker John Yarker are considered as representatives of a heady blend of political and mystical agency, as are organisations such as the Shriners, the Zuzimites and the Nation of Islam.

Miller does not shy away from investigating how the influence of radical 20th century right-wing philosophers and ideologues such as René Guenon and Julius Evola and the emergence of a Masonry antithetical to the West were co-opted by radical Islam. The Iranian revolution is considered as an exemplar of how the mystical and the political can combine into a potent expression of social change. In a similar fashion the mythologies that often feed into anti-Western ideologies such as the 'Protocols' and the Knights Templar – as exploited by radical Islam or the Ultra-Right – are placed within the broader context of masonic history.

This new edition includes material on the political influence of Julius Evola within radical thought and a review of the books concerning Freemasonry discovered in Osama Bin Laden's hideaway. With extensive footnotes, bibliography and index this is an excellent introduction to an intriguing area of history and political action and would appeal to readers with an interest in the history of ideas, Freemasonry and countercultural movements.

A great read!

Chris Hill

★★★★★

# A true Victorian monster

The 19th century's unequalled vertebrate palaeontologist was also a rubbish archaeologist and very partial to venomous anonymous reviews

## William Boyd Dawkins and the Victorian Science of Cave Hunting

Three Men in a Cavern

Mark John White

Pen and Sword 2012

pb 302pp £18.95 ISBN 9781473812568

In popular culture, Cave Man was a three-trick pony: he hunted mammoths, hauled long-haired women into caves, and fought sabre-toothed tigers (or *Tyrannosaurus rex*). There is evidence for one of these 'facts' in *The Mammoth Hunters* (part of Jean M Auel's series of well-researched novels, 'Earth's Children'; there is even a cave lion attack). The others, though long-lasting, are more fanciful.

These fancies were built upon the investigation and collection in the 18th century, but mainly 19th and early 20th centuries, of artefact and bone finds in the caves of Europe and America, and fossil hunters' initial attempts to explain them within a framework that initially lacked any understanding of the true length of geological time, of multiple glaciations and of basic taxonomy and taphonomy (the changes to bones and artefacts after burial). The finds became an end in themselves, a competition (between museums) and their interpretation needed to become ever more impressive to the literate, neo-Darwin/post-Darwin general public that was eager for the next great find. (There are direct parallels with 19th and 20th century dinosaur bone collecting and collectors).

Prof William Boyd Dawkins (1837–1929) was a peerless vertebrate palaeontologist

He may well have known more about cave bones than anybody else in the second half of the 19th century, and is justly remembered for his contributions in that field. But he was a true blue heroic Victorian monster, and as savage as any hyena or the scimitar-tooth cat that contributed to the shedding of his reputation and legacy. Boyd lived through the critical transformation from trophy hunting and randomised cave sacking to controlled digging where micro-provenance and context

became kings. By accident not design he remained, despite being employed by the British Geological Survey for seven years, an appalling field geologist/field archaeologist, they had to remap some of his areas – he exemplified the need for precision, truth and accurate recording in any excavation.

In 1876 he was present at, indeed partly claimed to have found, two of the most spectacular Ice Age cave finds in Britain, at Robin Hood Cave, Creswell Crags, Nottinghamshire/Derbyshire border, namely an engraved sketch of a horse's head and the canine tooth from a scimitar-toothed cat (sabre-toothed tigers are unknown from Europe; in celluloid and pulp fiction they inhabited La La Land. They are not even tigers, but belong to the aptly sunny Californian-sounding genus *Smilodon*).

Even for Boyd Dawkins, this was *chutzpah* writ large! However, within a few years this amazing piece of well-placed good fortune (the right finds by the right person) turned into a bane as the finds' locality, timing, context and provenance were challenged in exchanges that pre-echoed the later Piltdown Man Hoax – challenges and counter

challenges that included public lectures in Manchester and London, 'anonymous' letters to the national papers and learned societies, 'lost' invitations, harsh book reviews and three-hour lunches. Dawkins's case was not helped by his refusal to clearly answer criticisms, by missing critical diaries, pages torn from others, and changed entries in field notes. All due to carelessness or deceit/hubris, or a combination – who knows?

It is difficult to feel sorry for the man; his 'anonymous' review of Darwin's *Descent of Man* likened it to a novel, and Darwin was not alone in being scorned and dismissed. Lesser men were more fiercely mauled and sidelined as Dawkins tried to out-Trump every slight and enemy. But inexorable karma is best served cold.

Prof Mark White unearths Boyd Dawkins's life in great detail (except for his last years when he became an economic geologist of some note and worth, involved in the exploitation of the Kent Coalfield and the Victorian attempt at a Channel Tunnel) in a straightforward and neutral style, but makes the story, the man, Manchester and the intellectual times totally compelling. This is non-fiction 'faction' at its best. Was Boyd Dawkins a fraud, a dupe or incredibly lucky? White's last chapter weighs up the alternatives and... but it would be a pity to spoil a classical Victorian mystery story by revealing the ending. Read, enjoy and be mildly scandalised by this man, his milieu and meals. It is one of the most enjoyable biographies of any Victorian/Edwardian scientist written in the last couple of decades.

Read it and be glad that academic science is a bit less of an Old Boys' Club now.

Rob Iyer

★ ★ ★ ★

## Cry Havoc

Volume 1 – Mything in Action

Simon Spurrier, Ryan Kelly, Nick Filardi, Lee Loughridge, Matt Wilson, Simon Bowland, Emma Price

Image Comics 2012

pb 160pp illus 40c £13.95 ISBN 9781582403818

*Cry Havoc* is not the first appearance of the Barghest in a comic (that honour goes to Wonder Comics in 1948), yet it is easily one of the most accomplished Simon Spurrier, a masterful storyteller, turns his attention to the complexities of folklore with the story of Lou, a London busker who is bitten by something she thinks is a werewolf, but isn't. Then everything changes. The story could be summed up as simply as that, yet there is a lot more going on here. First, how Lou's story is presented. Rather than a linear beginning, middle and end, the three sections are told alongside each other. Even though the whole comic is drawn by the same artist, Ryan Kelly, three colourists (Nick Filardi, Lee Loughridge and Matt Wilson) worked on the comic to give each part of the story its own character. This is tied together by the design work of Emma Price.

Spurrier has a feel for the nuance in folklore, and as the story brings in elements from Norse myth or Japanese folktales it never feels forced or crowbarred in.

On one level *Cry Havoc* is a visceral story about someone transformed into a beast from the shadows, dropped into a conflict they don't understand. On another it is an exploration of story and folklore in the 21st century. At turns bawdy, graphic and tender, it takes the reader along and never talks down to them.

Of particular interest to the forerunners will be the annotations at the back of the volume, where Spurrier outlines inspiration (such as the Black Dog of Newgate, and the delightfully terrifying Penanggalan) and decisions taken during the creation of the comic.

*Cry Havoc* is an example of how storytelling in comics can be distinct from either novels or film, and will appeal to many who read this magazine.

Steve Toase

★ ★ ★ ★





## ALSO RECEIVED

WE LEAF THROUGH A SMALL SELECTION OF THE DOZENS OF BOOKS THAT HAVE ARRIVED AT FORTEN TOWERS IN RECENT MONTHS ...

## The Memory Code

lynne Kelly

Atlantic Books 2016

Hb 216pp illus. notes. ed. £17.99 ISBN 9781 82339055

Have you ever wondered about the kind of imagination and memory our ancient ancestors must have had? Dr Kelly certainly has, beginning with her study of Australian Aboriginals who could name all the stars in their sky, the plants and animals in their landscape and the uses to which they could be put. Non-literate the ancients may have been, but they had prodigious memories while we struggle to remember a short poem.

Kelly's thesis is that, across the globe, these ancestors interacted with their environments, using systems of mnemonics that have been long forgotten yet are available to all of us. Before the advent of print, or even writing, the structures and contents of songs and stories, for example, can be used to encode elaborate knowledge or entire epics. However, most of the book is given over to exploring the idea of "memory spaces"; i.e. the creation of physical or environmental aids and the methods of using them, whether these be lengths of knotted string; totem poles and 'fetish' objects; megaliths, tombs, cave paintings, landscape lines and images; magical symbols and rituals; statuary of all kinds; even the geometric components of farming or house building.

Here is a fascinating idea, well explained and explored with such enthusiasm as makes for smooth and edifying reading

## Cover-Up at Roswell

Donald R Schmitt

New Page Books 2017

Pb 233pp illus. notes. bds. ed. \$15.99 ISBN 9780233023565

Schmitt, a former head of Special Investigations at the Hynek Center for UFO Studies, believes that the passage of 70 years since the notorious 'crashed UFO' incident at Roswell, New

Mexico, is sufficient distance to allow for a comprehensive overview of what really happened and what was thought to have happened. Wading, with some diligence, through more than 100 statements from investigators, witnesses, military and Intelligence personnel, medical staff and many others caught up in the affair, Schmitt assesses the relative degrees of reliability of their 'evidence'. From it he constructs a fairly detailed 'time-line' of the key events, and summarises in a chapter containing answers to the 20 most-asked questions.

He seems certain that 'bodies' were recovered, but undecided about their nature. He calls the event an 'anomaly' but refrains from defining it, suggesting instead that while the evidence confirms there was a cover-up, it was of the military embarrassment at not knowing what this invasion of US sovereign airspace was.

## Impossible Truths

Erich von Däniken

Watkins Media 2018

Hb 208pp illus. notes. ed. £14.99 ISBN 9781781 80836

While the subject is essentially the same drum that von Däniken was banging 50 years ago, it is interesting to see here how his exposition has matured since. He still adheres to the idea that 'flying machines', for example, are a feature of the sacred texts of most cultures because they are a memory of alien intervention. Put that to one side for the moment as he homes in on a handful of cases that stand out above all the rest of his material, specifically examples of exceptional materials engineering and monumental construction that challenge our ideas about the technological abilities of ancient civilisations. Chief of these are the gigantic precision-carved blocks of diorite at Tiahuanaco, in the Bolivian Highlands. This granitic, igneous rock is exceptionally hard and difficult to work (even with today's high-speed milling machines), making the production of parallel edges,

sharp corners, recesses and regular geometric forms an almost impossible challenge to primitive tools. Yet somehow, these tightly fitted diorite blocks – which were already seriously ancient when the Spaniards found them in the 16th century – have been crafted into complex Lego-like forms with orthogonal planes and edges as evidenced by modern photos and technical drawings made in 1892. It is good to read vonD's review of the whole 'ancient astronaut' thesis and how it fared over the years. More interesting, though, is his review of the recent but less well-known discoveries of cities and monuments in the Jungles of South America, and his further research in the Nazca region, with many new photographs and 'expert' witness statements. These remain marvelously mysterious, without dragging in the alien engineers.

## Michael's Mission

John Steed

Self-published via Amazon 2015

£43.00 356pp ISBN 9781500802629

## Michael's Legacy

John Steed

Self-published via Amazon 2016

£32.00 313pp ISBN 9781513105352

John Steed has created a sprawling alternative history of the world and its civilisations using a novel method: he traces images from detailed geographical maps on which he detects patterns and complete scenes. However, these extraordinary volumes go far beyond the pioneering works of Alfred Watkins, Katherine Maltwood, Mary Cairne, Nigel Pennick and others, whom Steed says inspired him to study 'terrestrial zodiacs', pictograms and ancient landscape art.

The first of these large-format books (*Mission*, with many line drawings) claims to be the autobiography of the Archangel Michael – from "49,600 years ago until his death at Machu Picchu sometime before Christ" who, with a small team (based in Somerset's Cheddar Gorge) experiment with eugenics to create humanoids to found

civilisations all over the globe. The second book (*Legacy*, which has colour illustrations) piles on the global examples of map tracings and explanations. The sheer quantity of these "picture chronicles" – which he finds wherever he looks – is, Steed argues, self-evident proof that he is onto something, that, and the curious way that place-names in nearly all languages become logograms comprised of Celtic Gaelic radicals. His resulting theories are often provocative (some might call them disturbing) such as the Garden of Eden scenario in which Michael persuades his wife to mate with Adam, a tame ape; or that the Atlanteans were a Celtic-Jewish tribe. While Steed has piled his undoubted enthusiasm into pages of detailed explanations, he can still leave his reader baffled. Even when compared to the works of other denizens of the inherently eccentric world of outsider art, these volumes are strange and unclassifiable... and expensive.

## Sky Critters

Anthony Mine

Empire Books/Janus Publishing 2016

Pb 272pp illus. notes. ed. £13.95 ISBN 9781851566515

Mine's title is more than just a nod to Trevor Constable's suggestion that UFOs may be forms of living organic energy. He starts from the twin observations (derived ultimately from John Keel's ideas about 'interdimensional entities') that many authentic observations of UFOs seem to have nothing to do with aliens piloting physical craft, and that UFOs tend to have a "spooky, surreal, even ghostly nature". Even if you don't buy into Mine's conclusion about a "cosmic intelligence" and "living UFOs", do read it for his coolly reasoned, wide-ranging overview of UFO phenomena. It is a critique of the materialist ideology behind modern science's woefully inadequate response to the accumulated canon of well-documented observations of aerial anomalies, many of them made by rational and critical scientific observers and investigators.

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## Much more than a replicant...

It doesn't make quite the same impact at home as on the cinema screen, but Denis Villeneuve's belated follow-up to Ridley Scott's seminal *Blade Runner* remains a thing of mesmerising beauty



### Blade Runner 2049

Dir Denis Villeneuve, US 2017  
Sony Pictures, £14.99 (Blu-ray)

Ridley Scott's 1982 film *Blade Runner* has continued to intrigue and engage audiences since its release; after an initially mixed reception, the dystopian neo-noir is now considered one of the most influential films of all time. With the passing years and release of more alternative cuts, the film raised more questions than it answered, making fans eager for a sequel, and almost two decades after it went into development, *Blade Runner 2049* finally arrived last year. In the current climate of reboots and sequels there was concerned speculation about which direction the new film would take, but Denis Villeneuve thankfully put these concerns to rest. *Blade Runner 2049* was not only an impressive follow-up to *Blade Runner*, it also one of the best sequels ever made.

*The world of the film feels not just futuristic but genuinely lived in*

Now released on Blu-ray, the film is an absolute feast for the eyes – although if you didn't see it in the cinema you won't get the full benefit of its impeccable visual effects and breathtaking cinematography. As with Scott's groundbreaking original, the production design of Villeneuve's film helps to believably establish the world of the film as not only futuristic, but also as a place that feels genuinely lived in. There are occasional callbacks to the first *Blade Runner* in terms of sound effects, musical cues, familiar items and graphics, as well as oddly clunky technology, but these connections are so subtle that they do not interfere

with the viewing experience and instead feel like natural parts of the film's world. It is also through this thoughtful and measured balancing of old and new that Villeneuve manages to make *Blade Runner 2049* entirely his own film, even as he builds on the foundations laid by Scott 36 years ago and extends that film's philosophical and existential questions into new areas.

The film's pacing might feel slow to some, but while it takes its time to dwell on details, it never meanders in terms of its narrative. The story (I'll avoid spoilers, just in case!) serves as a natural, yet deeply intriguing, extension of the original, so, fans of the first film will probably take to this one, while the uninitiated may find this as meandering, dull and inconclusive as many found *Blade Runner* when it was originally released.

While the film's marketing may have led some moviegoers to believe that Harrison Ford

would be a significant screen presence, Ford is merely a supporting character compared to Ryan Gosling's K, who is the undisputed main character. Utilising his knack for expertly portraying externally stoic but internally chaotic characters, as in 2011's *Drive*, Gosling delivers a career-best performance as the young *Blade Runner*, portraying K as a multi-faceted and deeply compelling character. The supporting cast also play their parts well, like Ford, Jared Leto doesn't get a whole lot of screen time, but he still manages to become a menacing presence, while the various associates of the main characters are all clearly distinguishable and all serve a specific purpose.

In conclusion, *Blade Runner 2049* is not only Villeneuve's best work to date, it is also a cinematic triumph that reminds us not just how rich the science fiction genre is, but also of the possibilities of the medium of film in general.

Leyla Mikeissen



### Blade Runner

Dir Ridley Scott, US 1982  
Warner, £34.99 (4K special edition)

Fanboys and fangirls undoubtedly dream of special editions like this: a four-disc package on Blu-ray and 4K Ultra HD of Ridley Scott's now seminal dystopian Sci-fi classic *Blade Runner* in all of its contentious incarnations. Disc 1 contains Scott's 2007 Final Cut. Disc 2 contains the Original Theatrical and International Theatrical Cut of 1982 and the Director's Cut of 1992. Disc 3 is replete with a rare Workprint Feature Version, the lengthy documentary *Dangerous Days* as well as 12 featurettes and an HD still gallery containing

## THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! ([www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com](http://www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com))

### Scars of Dracula

Dir Roy Ward Baker, UK, 1970  
Studiocanal, £14.99 (Blu-ray)

### Blood from the Mummy's Tomb

Dir Seth Holt & Michael Carreras, UK, 1971  
Studiocanal, £14.99 (Blu-ray)

### Demons of the Mind

Dir Peter Sasuly, UK, 1971  
Studiocanal, £14.99 (Blu-ray)

### Fear in the Night

Dir Jeremy Sampson, UK, 1972  
Studiocanal, £14.99 (Blu-ray)

In 1970, The British Board of Film Censors (today, the 'C' stands for 'classification') changed the entry age for an X certificate from 16 to 18. And boy... what a difference those two years made! With a proper 'adults-only' certificate, formerly taboo subjects like rape, incest and graphic murder could now be explored in lingering, horrible detail. Studiocanal have released a crop of Hammer films from the early 70s, three of which take this certificate change, and gleefully run with it.

First up is *Scars of Dracula* (1970), which many Hammer fans think is crap. To be honest, it is – but I still have a soft spot for it. Especially the first half-hour, which throws in everything from bawdy sex comedy, unconvincing bats vomiting blood and then a shocking, zoom-tastic scene of a village church filled with mutilated women. Just watch how long the camera lingers to see the full effect of that certificate change. Dennis Waterman is the irritating hero, and Christopher Lee's Dracula is surprisingly chatty compared to previous outings. The film doesn't show much



*The director died of a heart attack after a week-long bout of hiccups*

class, or even respect for its predecessors, but it's still a hoot to watch. Keep an eye out for a gratuitous scene where Dracula skips the fangs, and viciously stabs his side-chick with a dagger.

1971 saw Hammer's throat-ripping, cleavage-heavy *Blood from the Mummy's Tomb* hit the screens. Based on Bram Stoker's novel, *The Jewel of the Seven Stars*, it takes the Hammer mummy in new directions. For a start,



the gory action skips the ancient Egypt locale. Now we're in a strange timeless London with 1970s record players, Lovcraftian motor cars and an asylum that's straight out of Victorian England. The threat's different too. Shuffling dead blokes wrapped in bandages are replaced by a mystical ancient force set to resurrect a beautiful Egyptian queen. Sadly, this evil force spilled over into real life, in what's known as Hammer's 'cursed' production. Peter Cushing left the set three days into filming, when his beloved wife died. Then, precisely a month later, the director died of a heart attack (after a week-long bout of hiccups, which the crew all laughed at). A crew member even died in a motorbike crash during filming, even creepier when the film features a scene where a body is found trapped under a motorbike. Bad vibes aside though, the film itself is really quite a treat.

The brutality continues that same year with *Demons of the Mind*, a bizarre, almost arthouse tale of incest, murder and the power of psychology (it's a thematic forerunner to Cronenberg's *The Brood*). An hour into this, I barely had a clue what was going on – but the plot solidifies in the last 30 minutes... including a wince-inducing throat stabbing with a set of keys.

Finally, we have *Fear in the Night*, from 1972, which is the only one in this batch you could play at your kid's birthday party this weekend. Opting for mystery over gore, this boy's-school shocker follows a mentally fragile young wife facing Joan Collins and a one-armed attacker. Peter Cushing's appearance is brief but wonderfully sinister, and rather sad too. Fans of Motorway Services (they do exist) might get a kick out of a strangely lengthy scene set in Toddington Services on the M1. Fans of vintage vinyl (they certainly exist) will also enjoy the twirling racks of budget Marble Arch records too.

over 1,000 archival images. Disc 4 is dedicated to the 2007 Final Cut on 4K Ultra HD. A 100-page booklet 'The Art of Blade Runner' completes the package.

One thing to note about the 4K version is the stunning sound. Vangelis's mesmerising music has never been such a treat for the ears, its huge synth swathes and detonations of majestic electronic brass indispensable in a film which for so much of its running time plays like a silent movie with musical accompaniment. If you've got the kit, it will blow you away.

Another detail to note is how grainy some of the original stock remains, almost giving the sense that Scott was at the time actually using the limitations of the medium for painterly effect up on the screen; an interplay between dusty mote-filled light and shade that the exposure of 4K almost strips away. Where it comes into its own is in the depth of field revealed within those vast, clogged Los Angeles streets, not only down and dirty at rain-soaked ground level, but especially in the vertiginous skyscraper climax when Deckard tries to evade Roy's relentless pursuit, and of course in that jaw-dropping opening where Scott unfurls the city's dense futuristic nightmare before us, lit up by massive spumes of industrial flame.

Nick C. Rkovic

★★★★★

### Wartime Chronicles

Dir Keith Barnfather, UK, 1987  
ReelTime Pictures, £14.99 (DVD)

*Wartime* was one of the unofficial *Doctor Who* spin-off videos from ReelTime Pictures, along with *Downtime*, the *Mundgame Trilogy* and *Daemons Rising*. It's distinctive for appearing while *Doctor Who* was still on the air, in 1987, the others were all from the "wilderness years" following 1989.

Warrant Officer (formerly Sergeant) John Benton (John Levene) is heading to UNIT headquarters when his jeep breaks down, very near a garden and ruin where he used to play as a boy – and where his brother Chris had died falling from the ruin. It was an accident, but Benton always felt guilt for his brother's death. Wandering through the garden, Benton



has flashbacks playing with his brother, his brother's death, and confrontations with his father (Michael Wisher), a rigid and uncaring military man who never had any time for him. Benton faces his demons, and emerges stronger.

It's a half-hour film, a one-idea piece, but emotionally quite powerful. Levene, who returned to the role having given up acting 10 years earlier, acquits himself well.

The other offerings on the first DVD are a series of mini-features, mostly with poor sound quality, discussing *Doctor Who* fan films before *Wartime Chronicles* – which, from the brief clips shown, appear to have displayed a lot more imagination and ingenuity than some of the later more “professional” spin-offs. There's also the obligatory “behind-the-scenes” film, where someone with a spare camera films the filming of the film; but there's only so much rehearsal, retakes and banter between actors and crew – often out of focus, with poor sound and from the wrong angle – that you can take before it becomes very repetitive and very tedious.

The second DVD has *ReUNITed*, a history of UNIT, and an overlong convention panel of Jon Pertwee and the UNIT team. A pleasant enough curiosity, but probably for longtime devotees only.

David V Barrett

★ ★ ★

## House

Dir Nobuhiko Obayashi, Japan 1977  
Eureka Entertainment, £16.99 (Blu-ray)

Blimey, where does one start with *House*? Perhaps it's best to begin by explaining that – title and haunted house premise aside – it has nothing to do with the 1980s US comedy-horror franchise. Now, under normal circumstances I have a real problem with comedy-horror films. They're never funny enough, they're never horrifying enough, and unless they get it absolutely spot on, each element undercuts the other. In the whole history of cinema the only film I can think of that made me laugh out loud and frightened the wits out of me is John Landis's *An American Werewolf in London*. Over 100 years of movies and only once has the horror-comedy been done right. That's how hard it is. However, *House* (originally

released in Japan under the title *Hausu*) is most unlike any horror film you've ever seen; in fact it's also unlike any comedy you've ever seen.

Seven schoolgirls (deep breath: Angel, Melody, Fantasy, Kung-fu, Mac, Prof and Sweetie) decide to spend part of the summer vacation with Angel's auntie at her isolated (of course) house in the countryside. Amid all sorts of supernatural weirdness, the girls find themselves unable to leave and start disappearing, one by one. Is the seemingly kind and gentle Auntie actually a killer? Or is the house itself responsible?

It's difficult to convey just how strange this film is but, since it's my responsibility as a reviewer to try, and despite the fact that it really *does* have to be seen to be believed, I shall have a go. *House* is one of the most bizarre films I have seen: it's not only the things that happen but also the array of visual techniques used to present them. There are musical sequences, animation, shonky special effects, very good special effects, split screen, breaking of the fourth wall and all manner of editing tricks. The Japanese love of popular culture is reflected in the imagery and style, which encompasses at least four or five different genres. The tone lurches from playful to sentimental to cynical to brutal at the drop of a hat. All of which leaves the viewer dazzled, confused, annoyed and at times thoroughly entertained. But its enormous verve and imagination is also its weakness; because the film never settles down, it can get a little wearing. It's a bit like watching *The Banana Splits* or *The Monkees*, remade by Takashi Miike, for an hour and a half which, given that those shows only ran for 30 minutes, is probably asking too much.

This Blu-ray release, part of the excellent *Masters of Cinema* collection by Eureka, presents a transfer which renders the film looking better than it has done for years, which is crucial because of its reliance on visuals – as opposed to plot or dialogue – to tell the story. There are plenty of extras too, which help shed some light on the genesis of this extraordinary, singular piece of cinema.

Daniel King

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

## SHORTS

### CAT 'O NINE TAILS

Anova Video, £24.99 (Limited edition Blu-ray)

Despite the title, don't expect any kinky whipping in this early Dario Argento thriller. But if you like garboring and funky-ass basslines this'll work. A blind crossword maker (Karl Malden) and a young reporter (James Franciscus) investigate the rising body count after a break-in at the world's poshest genetics lab. Argento was never a big fan of this, his second feature. It turned out too 'American', he said, and he felt the cinematography was uninspired. Yet it does feature a couple of highly effective scenes. A Hitchcockian train murder and a wince-inducing lift shaft death hint at the elaborate set-piece murders held end up becoming famous for. **Peter Lewis** ★ ★ ★

### JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE OF THE EARTH

Eureka Entertainment, £14.99 (Blu-ray)

A rollicking family adventure in the classic Hollywood style, this blends the best of the studio system with old school European charm. Based (loosely) on Jules Verne's classic novel, it stars James Mason as Professor Lindenbrook, a man convinced that exploration deep below the Earth's surface – perhaps even all the way to the centre – is not only possible but has been tried before. Tagging along for the ride with the Prof are Pat Boone as his enthusiastic student, Arlene Dahl as the love interest, and Peter Ronson as the man-mountain beast of burden Hans. Oh, and Gertrude the duck. It's great stuff and packs an enormous amount into its two-hour running time, even if it does take a little while to get going. There are cave tunnels, waterfalls, salt mountains, giant mushrooms, lost civilisations and, perhaps best of all, monsters! It's all done in the studio of course, on real sets, as opposed to the CGI that would be used today. It looks marvellously fake, but then that's part of its appeal for modern viewers. Adventure films like this still get made today but methods have changed dramatically and something of the childlike wonder crucial to such fantasy has been lost. Great fun. **Daniel King** ★ ★ ★ ★

### THE HOUSEMAID

Eureka Entertainment, £12.99 (Dual Format)

For far too long, horror films the world over have traded on the same old visual tropes, but in recent years one has come to dominate them all: the ink-haired, drooping wet figure of a pale-faced female. As an indication of how prevalent this image is, I was recently sent a batch of four films to review and two of them featured it heavily. Although its origins lie in centuries-old folklore, it's most familiar to us from *J-Horror* films of the last 20 years, such as the *Ringu* and *Ju-on* series. Unfortunately, 20 years of over-exposure has robbed the image of the power it once had (and it's worth remembering that in the early days it was extremely potent). So any film which deploys it now had better have something else to offer besides if it isn't to fail before it begins. In this particular case, from Vietnamese director Derek Nguyen, cast female is Camille, the long-dead wife of a French plantation owner (Jean-Michel Richaud) in Vietnam during the first Indochina war. Driven to despair by her husband's prolonged absence due to his military career, Camille had strangled their infant son and drowned herself in the lake. Years later, her undead spirit gets the hump when serving girl Linh (Nhing Kate) becomes romantically involved with the grief-stricken and lonely husband. Mayhem ensues. I'm sorry to say there really isn't much that's terribly original on show here, particularly in visual terms: inexplicable pools of water, doors that shut by themselves, ghostly voices, and so on. Having said that, it is absolutely gorgeous to look at and wherever else you might have seen all this stuff before, you're most unlikely to have seen it taking place in Vietnam during the 1950s. For those last two reasons I would cautiously recommend giving it a look; just don't expect any surprises. **DK** ★ ★ ★



## SOUNDS PECULIAR BRIAN J ROBB PRESENTS THE FORTAN TIMES PODCAST COLUMN

**A**s a medium, podcasts have been enjoying something of a boom over the past few years. The democratisation of quality media production through high-specification computer equipment has allowed a plethora of previously marginalised voices their own access to what were once quaintly called 'the airwaves'.

In the past, broadcasting (reaching a wide audience from a single source) was heavily regulated and controlled, mainly through frequency scarcity: only those authorised or licensed to have access to the airwaves were allowed to broadcast. In UK terms that, initially, meant the BBC, with commercial stations coming along in the 1960s.

In terms of radio, there have been amateurs since the invention of the medium, reaching a crescendo with the offshore 'pirate' pop stations of the 1960s that ultimately led to the BBC launching Radio 1. For the longest time, Radio 4 (or NPR in the US) has been the default home of quality 'spoken word' content, whether that was drama, current affairs, or documentary radio.

Now, anyone with a microphone and an iPad, laptop, or computer and the right software can produce a decent podcast and launch their work onto a waiting world. Not all of them are good, while many are far better than you might expect, sometimes surpassing the productions of 'legitimate' broadcasters like the BBC or NPR. When it comes to foretan topics, there are a host of podcasts out there, ranging from the polished and compelling to the amateurish and downright weird. SOUNDS PECULIAR is your insider guide to the best of the current podcasts dealing with foretan topics: all you have to do is sit back and listen...



**Podcast:** *The Unexplained*  
**www.theunexplained.tv**  
**Host:** Howard Hughes  
**Episode Count:** 300+  
**Format:** Interview, discussion, debate  
**Established:** May 2006  
**Frequency:** Approx. weekly  
**Topics:** Anything from the realm of the unexplained...

*The Unexplained* is a UK foretan podcast that has been running for over a decade, presented by writer and broadcaster Howard Hughes.

Hughes comes from what might be termed a 'hard news' background, reporting and presenting news for the BBC, Talk Radio, and Capita Radio among others; events he has covered in person include 9/11 (reporting from 'ground zero'), the death of Princess Diana, and the 7/7 terrorist bombings in London. He's not the average credulous podcaster who believes every weird thing he covers without question.

With a lifelong interest in the paranormal, he's combined his journalistic training, experience, and instincts with the strange and the unknown, hoping to assess the evidence, interview those involved, and present the findings to listeners.

Each episode is around an hour in length, and can vary from a programme focusing on a single subject or an interview with a single guest to a round-table discussion between several people or a 'magazine' format made up of three or four individual segments concerning a variety of topics. Holding it all together is Hughes's approachable presentational style – doubtless the product of his experience in BBC and commercial radio – anchoring each programme in a 'real world' background in which these unexplained issues are put on a par with regular news.

Hughes is a friendly but sharp interviewer; he's interested and knowledgeable about the subjects, knows the questions to ask and sometimes even asks the sort of questions that others have perhaps been reluctant to broach. He gives his guests enough space to make their points, but is also willing to interrogate them about things that don't add up

Given the 12 years or so that the show has been running and the very broad range of subjects it has covered, Hughes occasionally finds himself encountering a subject where he doesn't necessarily know all the background – but he's perfectly willing to find himself being educated alongside his listeners.

Of his approach to the subject matter of *The Unexplained*, Hughes (speaking in a 2007 podcast) explained: "It is good to be able to question, and to not just accept. We cease to be journalists if we just accept what we're told. I still have the ability and the drive to press people on these subjects and say, 'Well, actually, that may not be so...'" He says that he sees his job as being to report what he finds, and not to censor it in any way, no matter how weird, oddball or downright crazy it might sound. "We're not going to learn anything unless we let these people talk," he notes. "You can dismiss it as the biggest load of old rubbish ever. I might do that too, at the end of it all. [But] we've got to hear it."

This approach undoubtedly has much to commend it, but you may occasionally find yourself questioning

Hughes's 'hard' journalistic approach when the likes of David Icke and U Geller turn up repeatedly as interviewees and are given plenty of time to speak without ever encountering much in the way of the serious questioning that Hughes likes to think he engages in. While it can be argued that sometimes the best approach is to give people enough rope to hang themselves, the result is that Hughes can at times simply appear credulous, and *The Unexplained* can come across as a vehicle for the views of cert-fied whack jobs who are not interrogated with enough vigour.

It's a professionally put together package, and Hughes is an engaging personality, but some of the ideas presented and interviewees offered up for our entertainment get off rather lightly. If that doesn't bother you, there is much in *The Unexplained's* many episodes that might be worth your time and attention.

**Strengths:** Hughes's radio quality voice is a boon (although he does sometimes sail close to 'Smashie & Nicey's' cliché).

**Weaknesses:** Although coming from a 'hard news' background, Hughes sometimes lets his interviewees off lightly.

**Recommended Episodes:**  
**Episode 266:** *Conspiracy Theories* (researcher James K Lambert explains how they just don't stack up);  
**Episode 233:** *Philip Mantle* (featuring one of the UK's top ufologists);  
**Episode 238:** *Remote Viewing Adolf Hitler* (a whacky journey through time into the mind of a dictator);  
**Episode 244:** *Shadow People* (with Canadian researcher Adam Tomlinson).

**Verdict:** A mixed bag: there are so many episodes of *The Unexplained* that you are bound to find something to like among them, but the journalistic rigour Hughes claims is sometimes AWOL.



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# LETTERS

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## Expanding Earth

Andy Kelly's letter (FT362:75) brings to mind the old idea of the expanding Earth as an explanation for continental drift. It is such a neat idea, given that in the distant geological past, all of Earth's land was joined together in one super-continent, one can suppose that this may at that time have covered the entire planet. Then if the Earth started to expand, the continental crust would have to break up and separate into the individual continents we see today. One of the chief exponents of this idea was Alfred Wegener. He is sometimes credited with discovering plate tectonics, but this is false. He wrote about continental drift; the correct explanation of why continents are mobile (plate tectonics) did not come for another 30 years with the work of people like Dan McKenzie and Drum Matthews.

Which brings me to something I call the "Wegener Defence", which you see quite often advanced by those with heterodox or pseudoscientific views, who sometimes feature in the pages of FT. This goes: "People were scornful of Wegener because he was an amateur, but he was right!" (Hence, or otherwise, I must be right also.) People were scornful of Wegener not because he was an amateur, but because he was wrong. Not about continental drift, but about the expanding Earth hypothesis.

Actually, it is not totally impossible for a planet to change size: Mercury has shrunk (see P Byrne, 'Mercury: the incredible shrinking planet', *A&G*, vol 59, 2018, pp 14-19). It has a very thin crust over its mantle and core. When the inner planet cooled, it contracted, and the resulting shrinkage caused the crust to buckle and form ridges, which have been observed by missions sent to the planet (Mariner 10 and MESSENGER).

Roger Musson  
Edinburgh

## Age-old habits

With regard to Simon Besson's letter about the secret to longevity being consistency and picking your poison (FT349:69), I would like to proffer the kiljoy counter-



argument: that after living such a very long time, supercentenarians are going to have their little quirks to make their rut bearable and will doubtless want to talk them up – especially if he or she happened to live longer than expected for a chain smoker, since that's radical and transgressive and cool. I would propose that the secret to longevity is not dying, not running through heavy traffic as a matter of religious observance... that sort of thing. I will, nonetheless, share this poetic gem from Charles Bukowski. "Find what you love and let it kill you". Apparently, the most frequently occurring Famous Last Words are. "Hey, watch this!"  
Chris Wright  
Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex

## In search of taps

Jerome Clark presents an entertaining discussion of "Mr Wilson and the aeronauts of 1897" (FT362:38-43), but could have

noted one strangely recurring detail. Perhaps it was a design flaw in the mysterious dirigibles, but they seem to forever have needed to stop and take on a bucket or two of water, thus occasioning the meetings with bemused witnesses. This excuse for landing thus has JR Ligon taking four of them to his house near Beaumont where "they each filled two buckets", probably where Rabbi Levy also spoke with them. A day later, Sheriff Baylor in Uvalde conducts presumably the same chaps to a hydrant where they top up again.

Two days after that, Frank Nichols is awakened near Josseland by an airship landing in his cornfield and "two bucket-bearing men" ask to draw water from his well. Six days later Deadwood's HC Legrone meets five crew members from a landed craft and again, two of them have "rubber bags" that they need to fill with water. Lastly, Sheriff RW Dowe is called out at midnight and has a conversation with three

men from an "air ship" who have landed to fill their "canteens" on the banks of the Rio Grande near Eagle Pass.

One explanation that supports the narrative structure of the encounters is that the stories (which is not to suggest that they are fictional) need a reason for the craft to have landed, sightseeing in a cornfield, a back lane or the Rio Grande at midnight are simply not very convincing motives for the aeronauts to have landed and be ambling around so that the meetings can take place. Hence the buckets, bags and canteens – "Excuse us, mind if we use your tap sir?"

One might speculate that weight considerations prevented a few barrels being part of the equipment and that simply stopping every so often and replenishing a small water supply was expedient. But what about eating? None of the encounters involve questions about "that pumpkin pie y'all have coolin' on the window ledge

# LETTERS

yonder" or food of any sort. And don't get me started about the on-board lavatory situation – it's highly likely that the aeronauts were off-loading some excess baggage while they claimed to be innocently stopping for a cool drink

**Robert T Walker**  
Wagga Wagga, New South Wales

## What the...?

Is that a black cat behind Paranormal Ranger Jonathan Dover in "The truth is around here... somewhere" by Paul Ross [FT361:45]? Or an owl, or a small Bigfoot, or an alien of some type? Or a trick of the light... or just plain "whatever"? [The latter – Ed]

**Len Watson**  
West Ipswich, Queensland

## Rosemary Brown

I read with great interest Alan Murdie's article about Rosemary Brown and her spiritual composers [FT363:16-18]. I was at grammar school in Clapham with her daughter Georgina, and frequently went to her home after school to play records – although we were more interested in pop music than Rosemary's classical leanings. In Georgina's room at the top of the house we would fire up the Danette record player and load up our latest rave raves. I remember playing "Wild Thing" by The Troggs at full volume and dancing noisily round the room. We knew that if the parlour door was closed we should not disturb Mum. I remember Georgina was completely unfazed about what went

on in the parlour and the piano playing that drifted through the old creaky Victorian house in Balham seemed completely normal to her. Just to correct the time line a bit: Georgina is the same age as me (born in 1953), so she was eight years old in 1961. I think her brother Tom was younger.

An hour before I opened FT and read the feature, I had been sorting out my study and found a photocopy of Rosemary's obituary tucked inside a book. It must have been in there since 2001.

**Jill Lee (née Mogard)**  
By email

## Screen memory?

I enjoyed reading the Fairy Census reports [FT362:30-37]. The accounts were very interesting, though one in particular stood out and caught my attention. This was case #357 (US, Oregon, 1970s) of the young child being sent to bed as a punishment, and then seeing a caravan of gnome-like creatures walking out of his wardrobe. The child went screaming to his parents, whereupon the father took the child back into the bedroom, only this time he restrained the child by placing duct-tape over his mouth and around his hands and feet, and then left the room leaving the child in the dark. The gnomes returned and this time managed to climb onto the bed; they began playing with the tape and the child's eyelashes. This story certainly comes across as another account of childhood high strangeness, with the typical bedroom visitor scenario, but the detail that made me think twice was the abusive actions of

to make the jump to even more serious abuse.

Could the child in question be fabricating a screen memory of sorts? A psychological coping mechanism to deal with, and cover over with fantasy support, certain traumatic events or memories of physical/sexual abuse? (See Craig Steel, 'Hallucinations as a trauma based memory: implications for psychological interventions', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2015; 6: 1262.) On the other hand, perhaps these entities are interested in, and are actually appearing to children (either as energy projection or externalised manifestation) because of their traumatic/abusive experiences, a sort of ultraterrestrial social worker! It's an interesting idea and one that could well merit further investigation.

**John Hope**  
Dorset

## Puzzles of 9/11

Why do people believe conspiracy theories? asks the Hierophant's Apprentice while presenting Rob Brotherton's *Suspicious Minds* in 'Building a Fortean Library' [FT359:50]. Well, as far as 9/11 is concerned, I question the official story simply because I believe in the laws of physics, and when making extraordinary claims – that steel-framed modern buildings will collapse entirely at close to free fall acceleration after burning for several hours across a few floors, which is the official explanation from NIST (the National Institute for Standards and Technology) – one needs extraordinary evidence, evidence that the NIST report does not provide.

Anyone who has read the report will understand that it presents no answers about the mechanics of the collapse of World Trade Center 1 & 2 (NIST's theory of the mechanics of the onset of collapse is questionable and NIST's own experiments do not back up their model), and that the official explanation of how and why WTC 7 collapsed (a single point of failure in one beam connection due to fire) is questioned not

only by thousands of qualified engineers, architects and physicists, but NIST changed their model of collapse twice, conceding partial free fall collapse (and all of the implications that entails) when their findings were questioned by physicists, and then simply stopped providing the data in their model (citing national security, desperately enough) providing only a computer animation that doesn't resemble the actual collapse of WTC 7 in any way. In fact the NIST report is full of the kind of conformation bias that 9/11 doubters are accused of in the piece.

Far from what was suggested, WTC 1 & 2 were not designed to collapse straight down but to withstand the impact of a fully laden Boeing 707, the largest commercial jetliner available at the time, a plane not too dissimilar to a Boeing 767.

Furthermore, it wouldn't have necessarily taken a large team to rig the buildings with explosives, given time and access, which, assuming it was a conspiracy, the perpetrators would have had. Buildings the size of WTC 1, 2 & 7 would have had all kinds of workmen going in and out of the building all the time. Some of those who worked in WTC 1 & 2 reported strange sounds coming from empty floors and a fine dust throughout the buildings in the weeks leading up to 9/11. The planes could have been set to home in on beacons in buildings.

As for Occam's razor – one has to ask oneself: is it more likely that "a handful of Arab fanatics" managed to bypass security and takeover four planes, happening to choose the day that NORAD and the US Air Force were all engaged in tactical training missions (involving hijacked aircraft) and managing to fly three planes into three buildings, destroying three buildings entirely (including one that wasn't even hit by a plane) at speeds that normal aircraft shouldn't be able to fly at the altitude they hit the buildings at, and doing a manoeuvre in a commercial plane that not only is almost impossible for most pilots but pointless unless they were deliberately aiming at the one side of the Pentagon that



BUFFY THE BUFFERING VAMPIRE SLAYER



## Junior forteana

James Watson **[FT360:75]** doesn't remember references to forteana subjects in formats aimed at children when he was a child in the UK. However, we had had plenty of them in the US in the late 1960s/early 1970s. There was a sugary cereal named after Quisp, the Martian that appeared on the box, the cereal itself was shaped like his flying saucer. We also had a break/fast drink called Tang; the astronauts were said to use it. The animated commercials often took place



on the Moon, and featured moonlings or moonions (or whatever one calls something that lives on the Moon) that are sad because they have



just run out of Tang. We had Mars Attacks trading cards, and of course Gerry Anderson's UFO TV programme.

It was not all UFO/Martian based fare though; other forteana subjects also appeared. Casper the Friendly Ghost had a daily cartoon show, and Ollie the dragon was part of the Sunday morning TV team of Kukla, Fran and Ollie. HR Pufnstuf was another TV dragon; his nemesis was a witch named Wilhelmina W. Witchepoo. We need a sea monster for this list, and we have one in Cecil from Beany and Cecil. As you can see, I was raised on a steady diet of forteana; this might explain a lot.  
**Jim Edenbaum**  
Monmouth Junction, New Jersey

had recently been reinforced. The three buildings that did collapse, did so spontaneously and fell at just under free fall acceleration (except for WTC 7 that did, for at least part of its collapse, fall at an acceleration indistinguishable from free fall acceleration) – or is it more likely that the owners of the building who are linked with figures in the military industrial complex as well as the US Government (some of whom were part of the Project for a New American Century, a group that had argued that "a new Pearl Harbor" would be required were the US to attain its goals throughout the Middle East) might decide that it's in their best interests for a catastrophic "terrorist attack"? After all, it's not even the first time the idea was floated. Operation Northwoods, a project from the 1960s, details

almost exactly that, although instead of Islamic fundamentalists, the terrorist acts were to be blamed on Cuba.

If you look at the winners and losers from 9/11 you will find those self same members of the US Government did very well, whereas those held responsible, Al Qaeda (formerly armed, trained and funded by the CIA to fight the Russians in the Cold War when they were known as the Mujahideen) and the Taliban have not done so well. One might also add that nothing anywhere near that scale has been attempted or undertaken since. Even the most devastating terrorist attacks haven't involved anything anywhere near as complex or had anywhere close to the impact that 9/11 had.

Unfortunately, the science is

with the conspiracy theorists, at least with 9/11, and the more you look the more you find. None of what I've said is beyond the realms of possibility. What I've claimed as fact is verifiable from official sources.

A lot of people comment on 9/11 conspiracy theory without having read the NIST report and without being aware of the various revisions (largely brought about by David Chandler) that it has gone through. When you have an event with so many unanswered questions, it follows that other conspiracy theories also thrive.  
**Matt Elliott**  
Nancy, France

**Noel Rooney comments:**  
The point about the buildings being designed to withstand

aircraft impact is not as straightforward as Matt Elliott suggests. Fuel load was not incorporated into the design parameters; plus a 767 flies faster, and is a bit heavier, than a 707, so the physics suggests the impact of a fully laden 767 would be much greater than that of a lightly laden 707. (There is a formula for impact being the square of velocity that backs this up.) There is no real consensus on the free fall question; Mr Elliott is entitled to question this, as many others have done.

The argument about fire is ongoing, but there is evidence to show that the fuel fire could have caused some supports around the impact site to collapse, this would mean that the top 10 storeys or so would fall onto the floors below, which were not designed to withstand that much weight. The buildings did not quite collapse at freefall speed, but at close to it. They fell straight down because the buildings were mostly empty space, into which material could implode.

So, while the questions are legitimate, most of them do have answers that preclude the conspiracy theory.

**Robin Ramsay comments:**  
My view is that al Qaeda did do the plane bombings – but there remains a mystery about the buildings' collapse, especially about building 7, which was not hit. The companion I would make is with the Kennedy assassination. It took the JFK body a long time to separate the killing from the cover-up; that is, to realise that following the cover-up would not lead to the conspiracy. Everybody covered up for their own bureaucratic reasons. With 9/11, the planes and the collapse have to be separated. This implies – as has been occasionally suggested over the years – that the buildings were already wired for demolition for some other purpose: perhaps in case of emergency so they could be brought down vertically, not doing too much damage to those around them. Do I smell the dead hand of insurance companies here?



# LETTERS

## Animals and music

According to Emma Wallace, "Music appreciation is possibly a uniquely human trait" [FT363:8]. But there is a very odd passage in Bill Adler junior's humorous book *Outwitting Squirrels* (1988). In the years before World War II, apparently, a certain Dr C Hart Merriam played music to squirrels in an experimental context, and it affected them in a peculiar manner. "Some were not only fascinated, but actually spellbound, by the music-box or guitar. And one particularly weak-minded individual was so unrefined in his taste that if I advanced slowly whistling 'Just Before the Battle, Mother' in as pathetic a tone as I could muster for the occasion, he would permit me even to stroke his back, sometimes expressing his pleasure by making a low purring sound... When listening to music, they sat bolt upright, inclining a little forward (and if eating a nut, were sure to drop it), letting their forepaws hang listlessly over their breasts, and, turning their heads to one side in a bewildered sort of way, assumed a most idiotic expression..." (p150).

I don't know what to make of this. There is also an account in Fred Wautzkin's book *Searching for Bobby Fischer* of a homeless Russian émigré and chess genius who used to sing to the squirrels in the park where he lived.

Richard George

St Albans, Hertfordshire

## Skinwalker Ranch

John Alexander [FT363:38-41] discussed Utah's colloquially named Skinwalker Ranch, which seems to have been (and perhaps still is) a hot spot for anomalous phenomena. It lies in an area known as the Uinta Basin. The caption of the photograph on page 39 implies that the ranch is in Vernal. However, it's some 22 miles (35km) south-west of there.

Alexander recommends the book *Hunt for the Skinwalker* (2005). Co-authored by Colm Kelleher and George Knapp, it describes strange events that reportedly befell Terry Sherman and his family at the ranch in the



mid-1990s. (They're given pseudonyms in the book.) The manifestations included poltergeist-type phenomena, UFO sightings, cattle mutilations, the disappearance of livestock, and other oddities. In 1996, after about two years at the ranch, the Shermans sold it to Robert Bigelow, the property and aerospace tycoon. The book goes on to describe the subsequent investigation of the local phenomena by the National Institute for Discovery Science (NIDS), a private organisation funded by Bigelow.

Several years ago, I was in touch with Dr Frank Salisbury (1926-2015), who included a chapter on the ranch in the 2010 edition of his book *The Utah UFO Display*. He'd had a number of lengthy telephone conversations with Terry Sherman, and the latter contended that many of the things in *Hunt for the Skinwalker* only resembled a true account of his experiences.

*Hunt for the Skinwalker* (pp3-9) describes an occasion early in the Shermans' occupancy of the ranch when a very large wolf-like creature attacked one of their animals, a calf. Despite being kicked, hit with a baseball bat, and then shot several times, the strange creature showed no signs of distress, and trotted away. Terry Sherman and his son followed it, guided in part by its distinct tracks; but then the tracks abruptly ended, as if the creature had vanished into thin air. (Alexander's article also mentions this incident, but describes it slightly differently.) However, Terry Sherman told Salisbury that much of

the story was based on hearsay, although he wouldn't elaborate.

Dr Garth Myers (1921-2011), a former paediatric neurologist, informed Salisbury that his late brother Kenneth, and the latter's wife Edith, had bought the ranch around 1933, starting with about 160 acres (65ha) and subsequently increasing their holding by buying further parcels of land. Garth explained that Kenneth had died in 1987, after which Edith had remained at the ranch until about 1992. She died in 1994, whereupon Garth and his sisters inherited the property, which they sold to the Shermans.

*Hunt for the Skinwalker* gives a rather different account of the history of the ranch prior to its acquisition by the Shermans. It states, for example, that the property had been unoccupied for almost seven years when the Shermans arrived. But given that Garth Myers was closely related to Kenneth and Edith Myers, I imagine that his version is more likely to be correct.

Garth Myers told Salisbury that he'd been close to his brother and sister-in-law, and that nothing strange had happened when they were living at the ranch. Salisbury (*op. cit.*, pp220-221) considered the possibility that Kenneth and Edith had had UFO experiences, but had refrained from telling Garth about them, because he was sceptical about such matters. But Salisbury indicated that there's only tenuous evidence for that: an associate of Salisbury's, known as Junior Hicks, seemed to recall an assistant at a drugstore telling

him that Edith Myers had UFO stories to tell. On the other hand, a rancher called John Garcia, with a property adjoining the Skinwalker Ranch, told Salisbury and Hicks about a UFO sighting that he'd had on his own land when Kenneth Myers's widow was still living at the adjacent ranch. Garcia's wife had also seen it, albeit fleetingly.

According to Alexander's article, the person who owned the ranch before the Shermans bought it indicated that he'd kept vicious dogs chained near the doors, to deter anyone or anything from approaching the house. Alexander adds, rather cryptically, that a number of incidents had induced the owner to employ this primitive, but effective, security measure. In a similar vein, *Hunt for the Skinwalker* (p11) states that there were indications that the previous owners had chained large guard dogs to both ends of the building. (Technically, at the point when the Shermans bought the ranch, the 'prior' or 'previous' owners would have been Garth Myers and his sisters. But I presume that Alexander and the authors of *Hunt for the Skinwalker* are referring to Kenneth and Edith Myers.) But if what Garth Myers told Salisbury is correct, it seems that Kenneth and Edith Myers didn't use large guard dogs.

*Hunt for the Skinwalker* (p16) claims that the greatest concentration of high strangeness in the Uinta Basin has always been in the area occupied by the ranch; but on the basis of his research, Salisbury (*op. cit.*, p236) doubted that, although he accepted that genuinely anomalous phenomena had occurred there during the Shermans' occupancy. In fact, he speculated that the Shermans had been singled out to experience such things, and that the tricksterish intelligence behind the manifestations had then orchestrated just enough activity to keep the NIDS team interested for a few years, but also frustrated!

Peter A McCue

By email



# IT HAPPENED TO ME...

First-hand accounts from FT readers and browsers of [www.forteanimes.com](http://www.forteanimes.com)

## Warning doves

A friend recounted this story to me some years ago. He was driving home quite late one night along country roads near where we lived in Shropshire. He had allowed the night drive and the relative quietness of the journey to lull him into drifting off to the point where, without realising it, he had stopped focusing on the road ahead. All of a sudden and out of nowhere two white doves swooped into his vision through the windscreen, fluttering their wings and so startling him that he instantly snapped out of his daze. Immediately upon refocusing, he could see he was almost at a narrowing of the road to allow for a small bridge crossing. Coming from the other direction was a very large truck, travelling far too fast to be able to slow and allow him to pass over the bridge first. He slammed on his brakes and just managed to halt before the truck came through and over the narrow bridge. All of this happened in a few seconds and left him very shaken. He was in no doubt that he would have struck the oncoming truck had he not been alert again.

Upon getting home he went outside into his garden to take some night air and reflect on the near-miss. After a few moments he became aware of something on the roof and looked up behind him. Perched there were two white doves looking down at him. As he looked at them they rose up and flew away, leaving him even more spooked, but of course very grateful!

**Duncan Kaiser**  
Switzerland

## Action replay?

One rather grey murky day sometime in the late 1970s, as I stood near the back of my house on Goldslee Road, Swanley, Kent, looking towards the north-east, I watched two



aircraft coming from the direction of London and travelling towards the north Kent coast. They intrigued me as both were biplanes, the one in front being twin-engined the one behind a single engine machine. At the time (and still I think), the only twin-engined biplane flying was a De Havilland design with a very distinctive outline; this machine was definitely not that type, though too far away to identify any more clearly. The single engine machine behind was also unusual in the way it was flying. Whilst the lead machine was flying straight and level, the other was rising and falling behind it as though it was attacking the larger machine, but being faster was trying to use up some of its speed in the climb after the dive to stay to the rear. The distance from me and their relatively low altitude under the cloudbase gave me a sort of side view of the two aircraft. All this took place in silence, a fact I only considered after the event. The pair disappeared into the murk towards Longfield and the Thames estuary.

I have wondered in the years since if I witnessed a ghostly replay of a Gotha bomber of WW1 being attacked by one of the defending Royal Flying Corps aircraft as it returned from dropping bombs on London. Maybe someone with

more knowledge of the Gotha raids could tell me if this was the standard method of attack used by the RFC on the German bombers.

**Andrew Long**  
By email

## A figure I saw years ago

Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s I was a patient at the Odstock Hospital in Salisbury, Wiltshire, which specialised in pioneering plastic surgery. The hospital was built in the 1940s to treat American servicemen stationed in England.

In the early hours of one winter morning, when all the other children in my ward were asleep, I lay awake. The entire hospital was silent, and a night duty Sister sat at a desk at the end of a corridor, writing and reading by the light of a lamp. There were about 10 to a ward, I was not tired or even drowsy. I was wide awake. I had had no medication and my operation was two days away.

Suddenly, I became aware of someone or something moving about in the ward. I looked around and saw a figure leaning over the boy in the bed nearest the doors, about 40ft (12m) from where I lay. It appeared to be a male figure.

It seemed to glow white, but this may just have been as a contrast to the darkness all around. It made no sound, and was very focused on the boy, leaning in very close to his face. I remember feeling paralysed and unable to utter a sound. I had watched this figure for what seemed like minutes when it slowly raised a hand to the sleeping boy's face.

I suddenly found my voice and called out. The face of the figure turned around sharply and stared straight at me. The face seemed alarmed, angry and deeply sad all at once. I must have screamed, because the lights came on and the Sister came marching in and gave me a furious telling-off and a sharp slap across the arm, which I thought was a bit off considering I had just been scared witless, and was trying to stop what to me was a malevolent attack; but she was not interested in hearing my explanation. The figure had gone, although it was still vivid to me.

I don't know if the figure I saw meant harm or not, but I'll never forget the look it gave me. Sometimes I still feel sorry for the figure, and regret yelling out. I was unable to get to sleep after this, more due to the terrifying Sister than the silent ghostly figure, and lay awake until dawn.

**Stefan Badham**  
Parsmouth, Hampshire

## Gap in reality

Re Jim D's "tear in reality" [FT358:75]: I had a very similar experience in the spring of 2004, when a friend and I saw a large 'gap' in reality above a lake. It looked like a knife had been taken to a painting. It was the same shape as described by Jim D too. I would love to hear from anyone else who has experienced something similar.

**Gem Crowe**  
Birmingham

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magazine of news, reviews and  
research on strange phenomena  
and experiences, curiosities,  
prodigies and portents. It was  
founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to  
continue the work of Charles Fort  
(1874-1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany,  
New York, Fort spent many years  
researching scientific literature in  
the New York Public Library and  
the British Museum Library. He  
marshalled his evidence and set  
forth his philosophy in *The Book of  
the Damned* (1919), *New Lands*  
(1923), *Lo! (1931)*, and *Wild  
Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific  
explanations, observing how  
scientists argued according to their  
own beliefs rather than the rules  
of evidence and that inconvenient  
data were ignored, suppressed,  
discredited or explained away.  
He criticised modern science for  
its reductionism, its attempts to  
define, divide and separate. Fort's  
dictum "One measures a circle  
beginning anywhere" expresses  
instead his philosophy of Continuity  
in which everything is in an

intermediate and transient state  
between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-  
organism and the transient nature  
of all apparent phenomena, coined  
the term "teleportation", and was  
perhaps the first to speculate that  
mysterious lights seen in the sky  
might be craft from outer space.  
However, he cut at the very roots  
of credulity: "I conceive of nothing,  
in religion, science or philosophy,  
that is more than the proper thing  
to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first  
person to collect anomalies and  
oddities – such collections have  
abounded from Greece to China  
since ancient times. **Fortean  
Times** keeps alive this ancient task  
of dispassionate weird-watching,  
exploring the wild frontiers between  
the known and the unknown.

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# PHENOMENOMIX

EARLY 19th CENTURY GREECE WAS RULED BY THE OTTOMANS, WHO FORBODE ALL FORMS OF CELEBRATION...

IN THE HARBOUR TOWN OF GALAXIDI...



HUNT EMERSON

BUT THE GALAXIDIANS WERE NOT TO BE DETERRED...



IN NO TIME AT ALL...



THE TRADITION CONTINUES TO THIS DAY! ON WHAT IS KNOWN AS "CLEAN MONDAY", GALAXIDI IS ONE BIG FARINACEOUS FOOD FIGHT!



The Greeks, of course, have a word for it - ALEVROMOUTZOUROMATA (AAE:POMOTYZOY:POMATA)! It means "People throw flour at each other".



# COMING NEXT MONTH



## FAUSTIAN PACTS THE MANY FACES OF MEPHISTOPHELES



## INVISIBLE POWERS THE IRISH MYSTIC AND THE LEVITATING BUTLER



KUBRICK'S 2001 AT 50,  
CRY OF THE BANSHEE,  
HITLER'S CAT LADY,  
AND MUCH MORE...

# FORTEAN TIMES 366

ON SALE 26 APRIL 2018

# STRANGE DEATHS

## UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

On 11 February 1979 Peter Hanchett, Benjamin Kalama, Ralph Malaikini, Scott Moorman and Patrick Woesner boarded a 17ft (5m) Boston Whaler named the *Sarah Joe* for a fishing trip off the coast of Hawaii, but went missing after a sudden storm broke. A massive but fruitless search over five days covered 70,000 square miles of ocean. Family and friends continued the search for another three weeks, but all in vain. A decade later, several of the original search party were on a routine wildlife mission for the National Marine Fisheries Service. On the remote Taongi atoll (aka Bokak atoll) in the Ratak chain of the Marshall Islands, about 2,200 miles (3,540km) southwest of Hawaii, biologist John Naughton found the wreck of the *Sarah Joe* on 10 September 1988. A hundred yards away, Naughton and his colleagues found a driftwood cross marking a shallow grave. A lower jaw protruded from the coral calm, and on top of the grave under some stones were partially burned sheets of paper, 3in (8cm) square, interleafed with tinfoil, suggesting a Chinese funerary ritual, representing money and fortune in the next life. Dental records showed the jaw belonged to Scott Moorman, one of the crew of the *Sarah Joe*, who was 27 when he disappeared. No other graves were found on the atoll; in fact, no trace of the other crewmen has ever been found.

How did the *Sarah Joe*, a frail fibreglass vessel designed for coastal use, manage to survive the raging storm, and then drift all the way to the Marshall Islands and navigate a narrow channel to end on an interior sandbar? Experts have agreed that it could have feasibly drifted here within three months – but four years before Naughton got to the atoll, another research team landed there and allegedly found nothing out of the ordinary. This suggests the *Sarah Joe* had drifted for at least six years before making landfall. (However, one report asserts that relatives of the missing crew were told about the wreck and grave back in 1984.) Who buried the body of Scott Moorman, when, and why didn't they tell anyone? *reddit.com*, 13 Feb 2015; *mysteriousuniverse.org*, *thesanghokommune.org*, 13 Jan 2016.

A man in India died on 27 January after being sucked into an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scanner at Nair Charitable Hospital in Mumbai while visiting a sick relative. Rajesh Maru, 32,

was dragged towards the machine by its magnetic force after he entered the room carrying an oxygen cylinder. Preliminary reports suggested that Maru had died from inhaling liquid oxygen that leaked from the cylinder, which burst after hitting the machine. A post-mortem indicated he had died from pneumothorax, or a collapsed lung. A doctor and a junior staff member were arrested for causing death due to negligence. The victim's uncle said Maru had been asked to carry the cylinder by the junior staff member who assured him the machine was switched off. In 2014

two hospital workers sustained injuries when they were pinned between an MRI machine and a metal oxygen tank for four hours at a hospital in New Delhi. In 2001, Michael Colombini, six, undergoing an MRI scan in Valhalla, New York State, was killed when a metal oxygen tank flew towards the machine and crushed his skull ([FT155:29](#)). *D.Mall (online)*, 29 Jan; <- 30 Jan 2018.

David Baloyi, 50, and two other men trekked from a village in Mozambique to the Umbabat game reserve in the South African province of Limpopo, for a spot of poaching, carrying powerful hunting rifles. As they hunted in the darkness, they appear to have surprised or been stalked by lions. Baloyi was mauled and his screams for help panicked the other two, who fled, leaving behind two loaded .456 Winchester rifles and ammunition. The lions ate Baloyi, leaving his head and a few body parts, which were discovered on 11 February. In January 2017, three male lions were found poisoned in Limpopo with their paws and heads cut off. Lion bones and other body parts are increasingly sought-after in South East Asia, where they are sometimes used as a substitute for tiger bones. *BBC News*, *Metro*, 12 Feb; *(London) Eve. Standard*, 14 Feb 2018.

A plumber "driven mad" by tinnitus (ringing in the ears) strangled his wife and tried to kill his stepson. Vincent Nagle, 44, then killed himself by jumping off a bridge over the M1 motorway. He had been diagnosed with depression weeks earlier, and had told his doctor the tinnitus was stopping him from sleeping. He had been dumped by his wife Claire, 38, after 16 years. He strangled the mother of five at her home in Borrowash, Derbyshire, before driving to stepson Nathan Paton's house, where he hit the 22-year-old with a shovel and fired a bolt into his skull with a nail gun. The young man survived. *Sun*, 15 Dec 2017.



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